

SPECIAL FEATURE: ANIME & ASIA PULP CINEMA

# Femme Fatales

## WOMEN OF ASIAN CINEMA

BEATRICE CHIA

ZANGH ZIYI

EUGENIA YUAN

SHANNON LEE

AND MORE...

December 2001 Vol 10 No 8

12>



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### Inside the next Femme Fatales:



JULY 1997  
ISSUE OF  
FEMME FATALES

J.R. BOOKWALTER

• **THE FILMS OF J.R. BOOKWALTER:** The erotic-korner fulfiller of gatille filmmaker J.R. Bookwalter are spotlighted, including HORRORVISION, WITCHHOUSE 3: BLOOD COVEN, THE VAULT, and the upcoming WITCHHOUSE 3: DEMON FIRE with Brinke Stevens

• **GRAVEYARD ALIVE:** We go behind-the-scenes with the creators of the gore-fest writer/director Brian Keppel, executive producer Angie McDonald, and co-producers Andria Stein and Patricia Gorme

• **DANNI ASHE:** Once upon a time, she starred in B-films. This successful web-maven fills us in on her career, past and present, with exclusive photos, and tells us what it's like to have the most downloaded site on the internet.

• **PRISON OF THE DEAD:** Alice Arina, Debra Meyer, and Kim Ryan are profiled in this frightening Fall Moon extravaganza.

• As always, a directory of Websites devoted to your favorite fimmies along with upcoming news you'll want to know!

# Femme Fatales

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The Lascious Ladies of Horror, Fantasy & Science Fiction

DECEMBER, 2001

The rise of exploding martial arts films like CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON brings forth another surge of interest in "Asian Action" films. Did you know that Bruce Lee was up for the role of David Carradine's character in KUNG FU? At the time, it was said that America was not ready for an Asian actor. Lee was the first to come onto the mainstream scene when his low-budget PILOTS OF FURY (already a hit in Hong Kong under the title of THE SKI BOSS) was an instant hit at American boxoffices in the '70s. His biggest hit, ENTER THE DRAGON, had boxoffice success unequalled in its Asian film. (No, GODZILLA does not count!) How times have changed!

Enter Zheng Ziyi and Michelle Yeoh. These are not your typical action stars. They have beauty and brains, and have crossed the line from "Asian star" to "superstar." While Jackie Chan and Jet Li are martial arts superheros, there's something on-screen about watching Cynthia Rothrock in a micro-miniskirt and a pair of Mondo Babes draped-killing in evil-doers into submission.

We caught up with the beautiful and tenacious Shannon Lee. Hand sound familiar? It should. Ms. Lee continues the martial arts film legacy started by her father and brother—with a style uniquely her own.

Speaking of family dynasties... although actress Eugenia Yuan was born and raised in California, her mother is Hong Kong action-screamer legend Cheng Pei-pei, who, as writer Craig Reid put it, "In Asia is something like a female Bruce Lee wrapped up in a Jackie Chan." Like Ms. Lee, Yuan has worked hard to make a name for herself and confidently takes on the challenge of teaming up with her mother in FLYING DRAGON, LEAPING TIGER, a story taken from the same multi-volume novel by Wang Du Lin in CROUCHING TIGER.

Action cinema doesn't always mean action. Moving from the cult circuit to the living room, anime continues to grow in popularity. We talk to Central Park Model, leader in distribution of not only quality anime titles, but also of a phenomenon all its own: Asian-Pop Culture. These movies are creative, edgy, super-sexy and fun.

Have a safe, happy holiday!

—Lisa and Lisa



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# FATALE

BY DAN SCAPPEROTTI

● **THE FRIGHTENING**, the latest horror flick from director Dave DeCoteau, has just wrapped production. The ever-beautiful Brinke Stevens is featured as the mother of a young student who encounters supernatural creatures. "The film is basically *THE SIXTH SENSE* meets *DISTURBING BEHAVIOR*," said DeCoteau. "It's about a haunted high school that is the gateway to hell. It has a lot of plot twists in it, which I can't really discuss, or say what the movie is about, because it would give away the ending. It starts with a young man who comes to the high school as an exchange student, and his life turns into hell because the students in the school who befriend him are being murdered by these phantoms. These phantoms are four whistlers who are Satan's spawn. I haven't worked with Brinke in years, probably since *NIGHTMARE SISTERS*, and we were trying to find something we could work together on." DeCoteau now has his own production company Rapid Heart Pictures. Visit their website at [www.RapidHeart.com](http://www.RapidHeart.com).

● Poor Butter Stevens doesn't last long in *INCIDUS*, a new horror film shooting in Atlanta. It seems the German Queen is the first victim of a genetically mutated monster the Army has come up with. It's on the loose!

● Blonde beauty Gwyneth Paltrow is a heavyweight in 20th Century Fox's *SHALLOW HAL*, a new comedy from the directing team of Peter and Bobby Farrelly. Jack Black plays Hal whose pictures you'll find when you look up supercilious in the dictionary. Obsessed with only dating model-type women, Hal is suddenly struck with the ability to see everyone's real inner selves. Attractive bitches become huge in his view and although the charming Rosemary, played by Cedar Lee (former Paltrow), is obese, Hal sees only the beautiful women inside.

● Harris Crimson is re-launching the *Vampirova* comic book. Last spring they held auditions at New York's Acting Management offices for a new model to fill Vampi's boots. One gorgeous model after another paraded in front of photographer Lorissa Subrahmanyam and the Home interviewers, each hoping to be tapped as the next undead heroine. Among the hopefuls were the voluptuous Jill Nicosia, the



Brinke Stevens suffers another breakdown over her son's supernatural dilemma in Rapid Heart Pictures' *THE FRIGHTENING*.

beautiful Caroline Boda, and the charming Kimberly Marni. A cute, petite blonde named Jennifer Dean does an impressive backdrop as she wets to be called. As each of the women signs in, she's given a Vamp profile press kit to acquaint herself with the character. "It seems very exciting," said the twenty-four-year-old Caroline Boda. "Yesterday I had no idea what this was about. I never read a comic book in my life. I came in here kind of not knowing what to expect. I think I can portray the character. She seems kind of sexy but innocent at the same time. It seems that she likes to have fun and enjoys being around people and that's something I can definitely relate to. I'm wearing a bathing suit under my clothes, not that piece of string."

Arriving in a pair of jeans and a tattered t-shirt blouse, and carrying a bag containing a black bra, Jill Nicosia had done her homework. When her manager told her about the auditions, Nicosia had no idea who Vampirova was. "I went on-line and I looked her up," said the model. "I learned that she is a come-back hero, a hot, sexy woman. She's a sexy babe who looks like she can kick some butt, which is cool. No Wonder Women actually I always liked Wonder Woman."

The model is busy doing cataloge and commercial work and had a featured role in a Puff Daddy video called "Mava." "I play a tall-looking babe walking with him into

a bar, so that's cool," said Nicosia. "I just completed a featured role on HBO's *SEX IN THE CITY*. I play a cocktail waitress and I was supposed to have speaking lines but, of course, they cut them out. But that's all right because I still get my SAG wages."

After an informal contest, the gig ultimately went to model Mana Di Angelo, who became a writer after studying English and journalism at the University of Delaware. With a stunning figure and a beautiful face, it wasn't long before Di Angelo was at front of the cameras doing TV commercials and commercial print work. She has appeared on the covers of many romance novels as well. Although she works out regularly and does a lot of walking, Di Angelo avoids jogging since that regimen needs to reduce breast size and the model wants to keep her natural endowments just the way they are.

● The most sexual women in the world just hit video shelves in the DVD release of *EMMANUELLE IN SPACE: WORLD OF DESIRE*, courtesy New Concorde Home Entertainment. A group of aliens whose spaceship lingers above the Earth uses strange head sets to monitor the sexual activities of Emmanuelle, thereby gaining an insight to human desires. Liseeaus Krais Allen stars as Emmanuelle, following such beauties as Sylvie Kryszt, Mya Nygren, and Monique Gabrielle in the role. Of the secon-

mudy requirements, Allen said, "I'm not a real inhibited person. It was a little difficult at first because I was doing all those love scenes. It was hard. I'm a very open person and believe in being sexy and exposing your sensuality. During every love scene, I was Emmanuelle; I wasn't Krais. It was my character so it was okay."

● **DEAD SEXY** is the latest adventure for former Playboy Playmate of the Year Shannon Tweed. The beautiful actress plays Kate Molson, a fast-talking Los Angeles detective assigned to track down a serial killer who has killed a string of high-class hookers. When she meets a mysterious man named Ben (played by John Enos), her investigation is interrupted and maybe her life. Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment is releasing the film.

● Asian beauty Keom Shimamura stars as Ran, a Chinese hot woman known and feared as "The Black Orchid" who travels to Japan to avenge the brutal murder of her sister in *BEAUTIFUL BEAST* from Central Park Media's Asia Pop Cinema collection. After blowing away a couple of Yakuza kingpins, Ran takes refuge and falls for a young bar owner who had once been a member of the underworld. With the cops and gangsters on her trail, Ran mustn't get the ethno who were responsible for her sister's death. The picture is the fifth in a series of "Beautiful" titles that feature strong women but don't have a dominating character.

● The latest erotic occult film from Playboy is *SEXUAL MAGIC*, which stars Andria Carlson as Nina Richards, a young sorority student who is having problems with her boyfriend, Vincent. She moves into an impressive old estate with a quartet of other college girls. Nina soon discovers that her roommates are a coven of witches who are experiencing conjuring up erotic powers. Nina is soon being tempted by her new friend, a witchcraft nerd and suddenly her romance with Vincent takes an upturn. Unfortunately, her new happiness doesn't last long, and Nina is hit with a string of bad luck. It becomes obvious that dark forces are being used against her and Nina realizes that someone is lying to steal Vincent from her.

The cast also includes Jessie Welles, Kyle Parish, April Wing, and the spunky Amber Newman. Newman is no stranger to supernatural erotica, having starred in

**SEXUALLY BESWITCHED** and **EVIL AMBITIONS**. She had landed a role in Playboy's *NIGHT CALLS* 2 1/2 decades ago. When director Ed Holman got the script for **SEXUAL MAGIC**, he decided Newman was right. "The bill, and the actress was cast as Linda," Linda Fanchild said. "I play a witch and I ran a coven," said Newman. "We're just a nice little group of college girls who only practice good magic. However, you see shots of a blonde girl, and she's doing all this black magic, but at the time you're not supposed to know who it is. I'm doing all these horrible things to my sorority sisters, the girls in the coven. By the end of the movie, they find out, and I get them. I don't win in this movie."

"Everything my character does is based around sex, she's a sexual being. Even though she has black magic and spells and works with crystals, for the most part, she gets people under her personal spell with sex." I stated one of the other girls' boyfriends, I actually seduce Linda Fanchild, who is another one of my mainstresses. Linda is just a sexual being."

No stranger to softcore love scenes, spunky Amber Newman stars in Playboy's erotic, supernatural film **SEXUAL MAGIC**.

Being a Playboy production, the film has its quotient of love scenes, and Newman gets in the sack with practically the whole cast. "I have love scenes with Nina's boyfriend, who's played by Markie Kennedy," she said. "Then Linda Fanchild and I have a love scene, and Andrea Corrison and I have a little thing. An idea is a top model, and me to the business—one's a gorgeous girl. I was happy to work with her; she's great, an awesome actress. April Whig is gorgeous, she's a pony as trash, from what I understand. Jessica Wahler is Jezebel Reed, the porn actress."

With hardcore about to hit the cable and satellite nets, the B-movie industry is testing its bar as well. "As porn gets harder, the B-movies get harder," explained Newman. "People don't want to see softcore anymore because now it's too tame. There isn't any difference to any of the movies nowadays. I can remember five years ago when love scenes were completely different and, at Playboy, your love scenes weren't as explicit as other compa-



Sultry Julie Smith also posed for artist Luis Royo in his book, *Evolution*.

ries. Nudity and love scenes are more pretty yet." Newman's website is [www.ambnewman.com](http://www.ambnewman.com).

● The new science-fiction film from Lions Gate, **THE DEVIL'S PREY**, features a trio of actresses who are involved with a Barker-ewis lupine cult. Ashley Jones, who played Megyn Denison on TV's **THE YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS** for three years, and blonde bombshell Jennifer Lyons, are among a group who go to a wild party at a Rave club. Things quickly turn sour and they find themselves pursued by a van full of murderous cultists. Escaping, they hit Fawn, a young woman who stumbles into the path of their evil. Buttry Evans Lyons plays the blood-spattered Fawn, who claims to be escaping from the cult. The New Orleans native spent three years on the TV drama **USA HIGH SCHOOL**, as Lauren Fontaine. Tense moments are few and far between, as they try to outdistance the hooded killers.

● NBM Publishers has just published *Evolution*, a compilation of stunning fantasy art by Spanish artist Luis Royo. The art ranges from post-apocalyptic landscapes to female fantasy figures like those in *Evolution*. "The Time Has Come," "Primal Ministry," and the warrior

woman he did for *Heavy Metal's* F.A.K.K. 2.

"Fantasy allows imagination to fly and dreams and nightmares that are hidden in the subconscious to appear," said Royo. "To represent these matters is more attractive to me than to represent the everyday things. You can also isolate yourself in the out-of-the-ordinary designs of characters, clothes, binoculars and architectures. Those days when you are creating the picture you live in a different world."

The artwork models are an international blend of Americans and Europeans. Royo has used both Julie Strain and Julie Smith for his paintings. Strain was the model for his F.A.K.K. 2 canvas, which was used for the cover of a computer game. One image, called "Claude Essence," portrays a slender woman thigh-deep in water, sporting a rose ring linked to her ear. She is uncorking an ornate bottle. "That is a free picture and the intention, summarizing, was to reflect an enigmatic figure and to let mystery spring from a little detail, as the smoke arising from the bottle," Royo said.

"Julie Smith's Temptation" covers a page and a half and features



the model against a stone wall, with long tentacles slithering out of holes, which seem to be embracing the beautiful blonde. "I wanted to reflect the strength and desire of Julie Smith's body, focusing on the SF environment and using only her figure in the prototype, the rest of the language being expressed with the geometric background."

For the cover of *The Vampire Diaries*, a book published by Doubleday, Rayo created a trio of vampire women, wreaths-like figures emerging from a graveyard. "That was an order artwork, a cover of a novel about vampires with Gothic atmosphere."

The artist works with both charcoal and clay, creating some dazzling sculpted pieces as well as paintings. "For a long time, my work has been primarily focused because that is where I feel finer. Sculpture is a very exciting experience, but only as a personal challenge."

• Actress Connie Guigno, who scored big in *THE CENTER OF THE WORLD* and *SPY KIDS*, gets to play a dual role in *JET LI'S THE ONE*, because her character exists in two universes. The Columbia Pictures roulette diva action hero Jet Li as Yu Law, a renegade member of the Multi-Verse Bureau of Investigation, who has been jumping from one alternate universe to another, killing his other self in each new world, thereby gaining strengths and powers. Yu Law eliminates all but one of his other selves and only Gabe Law, a member of the L.A. Sheriff Office, also Li, stands in his way of becoming "The One." Guigno plays Traci Katherine, known as T.K., Gabe's wife, as well as the evil Yu Law's girlfriend, Mischa Welch. The actress describes Mischa as "a human version of Jessica Rabbit." Guigno also stars in *SHE CREATURE* as a woman possessed by a maniacus named. The film premieres on Jan. 10 as part of its *Circus* Features package of five features based on monster tales of the 1930s.

• Natasha Lyonne and Rosanna Arquette team up for *DAY & NIGHT* OF A SEX ADDICT, a new film being released by Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment. Michael De Sica plays a loving husband and father. Unfortunately he is also a sex addict. His dangerous double life threatens to destroy everyone he loves. Lyonne will also pop up in *DAY THE WORLD ENDED*, a film destined for *Cinemax*. She stars as a child psychiatrist who moves to a small town. Shortly after, a string of brutal murders occur and the finger of blame seems to point to her.

• On *POLY* of *TANK GIRL*, there is up against a road gang of



Beautiful Jennifer Jason Leigh plays a sexy psychiatrist in *HANGMAN*.

ghouls in director William Wesley's latest fright flick, *ROUTE 666*, heading straight to video courtesy of Lions Gate Films. Petty and low-level agent Lou Diamond Phillips rescue a woman with a protection program fugitive from a band of ghouls, only to find themselves stranded on an isolated desert road, with the deadly spirits of a murdered chain gang cut to pound them into the asphalt.

Philips has been busy on the genre front. In *HANGMAN* he plays Rose, a detective assigned to track down a serial killer who taunts him with videotapes of each murder. Rose teams up with brainiac MacKenzie Amick as Dr. Grace Mitchell, a sexy psychiatrist who may be able to help him solve the case. It's another direct-to-video thriller from Columbia TriStar.

• The fact that reality-based programming is being gobbed up by TV stations around the world hasn't been lost on producers of late-night cable. *VOYEUR*, a new erotic content program composed of twenty-seven half-hour shows, has been created by Richard Gibbs. Each show is composed of two fifteen-minute vignettes. The program was pre-sold to the Euro-pean market and will probably get

a cable spot domestically. "The goal of the show was to take the audience into the private lives of other people and I'm sure we've accomplished that," said Gibbs. "The entire show is shot from the point of view of a voyeur. It's much more reality show than the real world shows, where the people in it basically are actors anyway, and know they were being filmed, as they were acting. Our show was shot in an improvisational style and our actors were trained to ignore the cameras, so we've got some real drama, some real reactions, and we capture intimate moments of people's lives. Desire, corruption, love, hate—the full gamut of human emotion is covered in a real way. It's the antithesis of the 11:00 P.M. *Cinemax* type of erotic show. It's very cutting-edge. It has an edgy feel to it."

The program was filmed with three cameras grinding away at all times. Gibbs claims that there are a hundred addresses in the show, including Holly Sampson, Andrae Crouch, Avi Vincent, and Amber Newman.

"You've got your love scenes, you've got your nudity," said Amber Newman of the show's erotic content. "The love scenes are kind

of old school. They're not that explicit but you don't need it because there is such a tension there. It sounds crazy that fifteen minutes can be so intense, but they are, and they're all intense, there's not a script. You allow up and you don't even know the name of your character. There are only two to four people in each vignette. It's called *VOYEUR* because all the cameras are rolling all the time and they're getting little shots, like somebody is outside the window or somebody is under the table. Whether it's a husband and wife arguing or a married couple cheating on their spouses, someone is looking at you. Someone is watching."

• If you like low-budget horror films, B-movies, cult movies, or movies that are so bad they're funny, then check out the *Horror/Cult Review Show* on cable access Channel 36 in West Hollywood on Adelphi Cable broadcast on WHPA. The show is produced by Darril David Allen. They also showcase horror and cult magazines and web sites. The show has shorts and short films starring host Darril Nap (a skeleton/comic book girl) who sometimes hosts the show along with producer Allen and Darril's sidekick, Matress of the Underworld Hill-Finch. For more info email *horrorcultreviewshow@earthlink.net* or check out *Darril Nap's* web site at [www.darrilnap.com](http://www.darrilnap.com).

• Author John O'Dowd checked in to say that hot L.A. film producer Gina O'Ferren has optioned the film rights to his forthcoming biography of tragic '80s actress-turned-Sex-Kat Roseanne Barr. Barbara Payton (portrayed in the *HAMMER VAMPS* issue of *FF* Volume 8, Number 4).

O'Dowd's book, entitled *From the Gutter to the Gutta: The Rise and Fall of Hollywood Starlet Barbara Payton*, is a heartily illustrated biography that contains over 200 images of her from the beginning of her career to her final days on Sunset Boulevard as an alcoholic and heroin-addicted prostitute. Gina O'Ferren recently worked with L.A. CONFIDENTIAL author James Ellroy on the HBO film, *DETOUR* (based on the autobiography of Lana Turner's daughter Cheryl Crane), and is now producing *THE USS PUEBLO STORY* (also for HBO). She is currently shopping O'Dowd's book on Barbara Payton to several production companies in L.A. and is seeking a talented screenwriter to adapt the beautiful blonde's hard hitting (and unbeknownst tragic) story to the big screen. □

Busty new Xanadu  
model Maria Di  
Aspasia avoids  
jogging, for  
fear of losing her  
natural, ample breast  
size.



# *asian cine*

*From sexy adult animation to horror, Central Park Media, a New York-based company, is a leader in the distribution of films from the Land of the Rising Sun. We talk to video mogul Jay O'Donnell, co-founder and managing director, on the cult popularity of Asian Pulp Cinema.*

*by Dan Scapperotti*

*ema*





Once confined to samurai films and giant monster movies, the last decade has seen Japanese cinema gel a wider audience in large part due to the emergence of anime as a respected art form. While domestic animated films, usually the domain of Walt Disney productions, are aimed at family audiences, the Japanese industry produces films for specific age groups. The video market has opened a wide path for the flow of Asian programming to the U.S. market.

A leader in the distribution of films from the Land of the Rising Sun is Central Park Media, the New York-based company known for such adult-oriented anime as *THE BLUE GIRL* and *TWIN ANGELS* series. CPM was launched in 1990 with the documentary *IN THE BLOOD*. Originally designed as a "boutique media publisher," the company now handles a wide variety of films both live action and anime as well as a comic book line.



John O'Donnell is co-founder and managing director of CPM. A self-confessed "Jap-jock," O'Donnell, whose father was in the Peace Corps, grew up in Asia. He learned Korean while attending high school in Korea. In college he majored in Japanese studies and international economics. "When I lived in Korea in the '60s, pretty much everyone over the age of 35 or 40 spoke fluent Japanese," said O'Donnell, "because when the Japanese controlled Korea they had this odd little rule that if you spoke Korean in public, they shot you. My brother and I spoke Korean pretty well, but when we went to Japan no one spoke Korean. So when I went to college I switched to Japanese studies."

During the mid-'80s, O'Donnell imported VQJTON and released it on video, thus putting his distribution feet wet in anime. "I like Japanese anime," he said, "and I figured that it couldn't be the only one in America who did. So when we were launching our company and looking at what target audiences make sense and would be fun to deal with we said 'Hey, anime.' There's lots of stuff over there in Japan that's fun. We love watching it and screening it and translating it. We thought there was a big market for it and something the major studios weren't involved with. It was a niche market."

## anime

The first venture into the erotic anime domain was *UROROIJI TO OGI: LEGEND OF THE OVERBEND* which had a theatrical release playing to record crowds at midnight showings in New York. The groundbreaking film was created by the pioneering talents of Toshiro Mameda, who launched the "erotic grotesque" genre in animation. It was also the first movie in the history of New York to play simultaneously in subtitled and dubbed forms. The MPAA slapped the film with an NC17 rating and asked its distributor if they wanted to edit it to get a less restrictive rating. O'Donnell's quick response was "What, and turn it into a music video? There wouldn't be much left if we did that."

Adult animation from Japan had arrived in America. "It was shocking," said O'Donnell. "The good news is that *LEGEND OF THE OVERBEND* is absolutely hands down the most highly respected adult animation to ever come out of Japan. This is the *CASABLANCA* of adult anime. This is the

lowering grandfather of them all. A lot of these films are basically sex cartoons. We specifically launched with this title because we wanted to open up with a theatrical release, not direct to video. We wanted to establish the game with the most respected title in

they're very regimented in the sense that group identity is very important in Japan. Ever since Japan was opened to western civilization in the 1800s their education system has been built on a school uniform identity. The guys are wearing a black kind of se-

## "We live in a society that has castrated one of its most vibrant visual arts."

the catalogue so that we could prove the point that yes, there is a lot of sex in the thing, but it's literary quality, not just sex cartoons."

There are generally three levels of Japanese animation: theatrical release, original video animation, or OAVs which are designed for direct to video sales, and cartoons produced for television. "In terms of the number of cells and production quality, OAVs will always be a far more expensive production than a TV show," said the CPN honcho. OAVs, which are incredibly expensive in Japan, form the basis for many of CPN's anime releases.

The multi-part VENUS FIVE, DEMON BEAST INVASION, and TWIN ANGELS are OAVs with a decidedly adult flavor for sex and violence. One of the most successful of the erotic OAVs has been the six-part LA BLUE GIRL series which redefines the damsel-in-distress game. Miko Mido, a young woman whose clan has, for centuries, kept the sex-starved demons of the underworld at bay, is training to be a ninja. When a rival clan steals the signal cone, Miko and her sister, Miyu, are thrust into a battle with the forces of evil.

"If you ask people what the number two film is in terms of adult quality things, LA BLUE GIRL is the one,"

said O'Donnell. "Basically the whole story is about sexcraft as a form of witchcraft. Sexcraft is the way of keeping the human dimension and the spirit dimension separate and how the misuse of it can allow spirits from the spirit dimension to go and torment humans on the human plane. It ties in with Japanese culture in several ways. It ties into the whole feudal system, the Samurai tradition, events in the past showing how over hundreds of years this family clan has been keeping these secrets. Now there is no sexcraft in Japanese culture, but it is about handing down an esoteric knowledge, handing it down within a clan over hundreds of years, maintaining the clan identity. These are all things that are very standard themes in Japanese culture."

While Miko and her sister, as well as the other school girls, seem young, they are actually college students and are dressed accordingly. Women in these films usually fall into two categories and two costumes. First is the office lady theme, where the women are dressed in modern, powerful executive suits, which is called the OL or Office Lady look. Then you have the college girl look. "That can be anything ranging from the sailor suit look to the blazer/polo shirt uniform," said O'Donnell. "In the last hundred years you've had a school uniform system in Japan. If you go to Japan you're known by whatever clothes you're wearing. If you're a student, you're wearing a student uniform. If you're a business person, you're wearing a business uniform suit. If you're a housewife, you're in housewife clothes.

mid-military thing and the girls had the blazer and skirt and look like the Catholic college girls here, or an outfit that looked like the old Victorian school uniforms."

Outside of a few lone attempts to bring animation to an adults-only audience, American animation has been the province of the Disney Studios. Even today with other studios releasing animated features, Disney remains the dominant force in the industry. O'Donnell traces the problem back to the '80s



(Top) LA BLUE 2 and TWIN ANGELS (right) are two of the most popular adult anime series with mild sex and violence.



when comic books came under fire and the Comics Code was instituted. After all, comics are only for children, aren't they? "If it's a cartoon, it has to be just for children, right?" said O'Donnell. "In Japan they ask how many kinds of people do we have? Let's have comics aimed at males and comics aimed at females. For every market segment there is a comic aimed at them."

"But in America we have a children's market and we'll make comics only for that market. God help you if you make a comic aimed at a thirty-year-old. They'll think it's porno. That is why in Japan you have comics that have mature themes. Nobody cares. We live in a society that has castrated one of its most vi-



(T) O'Donnell called LEGEND OF THE OVERFIELD "The most highly respected adult animation ever to come out of Japan." (M) A scene from AMNESIA and (B) LA BLUE 3.

#### brant visual arts."

The outpouring of erotic animated adventures continues with another release from CPM, TWIN ANGELS. The enrollment list of an all-girl school includes Mai and Ai Amatsu, beautiful nineteen-year-old twins who, under their innocent, schoolgirl appearances, are actually descendants in a long line of Guardians of Virtue who protect the world from the encroachment of the Solanic Pleasure World. When they are assigned to protect Onimaru, a young teenager, the twins discover he is half-demon and about to reach sexual maturity. The crossroads in his life can have profound repercussions, for if he chooses the path of darkness he will become the next all-powerful Demon Lord and both worlds will become a penetrated sex universe. Mai and Ai must not only sway Onimaru to the path of light, but rescue their classmates who have been dragged into the dark realm to serve as Royal Love Slaves for the demon. Onimaru is introduced to such sexual perversions that even the Mitchell Beahrs couldn't conceive. You're sure not going to see this on the Sci-Fi Channel!

"If you look at films like TWIN ANGELS and VENUS FIVE you start to see a little bit of parody taking place, references to other cultural things, other popular programs," said O'Donnell. "In VENUS FIVE, your basic concept is you have a team of girls who have to go out to fight evil, and they change from normal college students into crime-fighting, demon-fighting, uniformed, swinging angels. In TWIN ANGELS, you have the basic story that they are Ninja warriors from a long line of feudalistic Samura clans, and they are the current incarnation of those who have to keep the demons in the Demon World, and prevent them from coming into the main world. It plays off the idea that you have different dimensions. You have the demon world, the spirit world, the human world. That's a very common theme in adult animation because it ties in a level of horror and a level of the supernatural to what's going on. You escape the human world by creating other dimensions and by populating them with weird crea-

tures and creating the dynamic tension by bringing them from the Demon World into the Human World and watching the interactions."

The anime domain runs the gamut from popular children's programming, like *Pokemon*, to *LA BLUE GIRL*, and everything in between. Surprisingly, CPM and other distributors have created no stain in the repressive ranks of society. "It's assumed that the person watching it is a reasonably intelligent adult interested in a great story, great characters, and great dramatic development, who doesn't need to be entertained by girls with big boobs bouncing around. It's harder than hell trying to get people to talk about those titles because everyone wants to ask questions about *LA BLUE GIRL*."

O'Donnell is quick to point out that there is more to anime than girls and monsters. Much more. Anime has been used as a form of animated Classics literature in Japan, covering the entire history of Japanese culture and literature. Besides series like *DEMON BEAST INVASION*, CPM also distributes such classic fare as *THE SOUND OF WAVES*, a beautiful love story from Yasunari Kawabata, who won a Nobel Prize for literature. "Go figure. The American press wants to just focus on

the gay adult stuff and it's impossible to get coverage of things like the animated version of the stories that won the Nobel Prize," said O'Donnell, only slightly frustrated at the lack of attention paid to the other aspects of anime. He proudly points to their series short-form releases, which are summaries of the top twenty titles in Japanese literary history, including *BORZAN*, *THE SOUND OF WAVES*, and *THE BU DANCER*, books as familiar to Japanese students as *DAVID COPPERFIELD* and *HUCKLEBEA* are to American kids.

"If I had to recommend one non-traditional anime, it would be *GRAVE OF THE FIREFLY*," said O'Donnell. "It's based on a book that won the Pulitzer Prize in Japan. I defy you to watch it without tears. It can't be done. The world of anime has so much to it; it's so deep and all-encompassing in terms of content and scope. It's aimed at





Kei Mizutani (in tub) has been called the hottest Asian B-movie actress ever. Here she is in a scene from the popular **WEATHER WOMAN** series.

# asian pulp cinema

me guys are not necessarily foreign movie buffs. They do tend to like anime-like live action movies, so we wanted to focus on Asia. We're great when it comes to the Asia-America connection. About a third of my company are Asian people. China, Korea, Japan, Thailand. We speak all the different languages. We have an audience looking for this stuff. Let's find great examples and bring it to them."

Realizing that their anime customer base enjoyed other film types such as Hong Kong action films and rubber-suited monster flicks, CPM recently moved into the live-action entertainment field under the umbrella "Asia Pulp Cinema." "We're not talking 'foreign films.' We're not talking 'art movies.' We're talking pure entertainment movies. Generally speaking, anime guys are not necessarily foreign movie buffs. They do tend to like anime-like live action movies, so we wanted to focus on Asia. We're great when it comes to the Asia-America connection. About a third of my company are Asian people. China, Korea, Japan, Thailand. We speak all the different languages. We have an audience looking for this stuff. Let's find great examples and bring it to them."





Keiko Mizutani starred in the first WEATHER WOMAN film, but she declined to appear in the second film after reading the script. She also appeared in THE LADIES' PHONE SEX CLUB (below).



One live-action film that seemed to fill the bill was WEATHER WOMAN, which was based on an adult manga and previously filmed as an anime video series, WEATHER REPORT GIRL. When the regular weather girl is unable to appear during a broadcast, Keiko is hired to replace her for the night. Realizing this is her big break, Keiko makes sure she's not quickly forgotten by flashing her underwear to the audience. Amidst the media frenzy that follows and Keiko's soaring popularity, her competitors desperately seek to unseat the new Weather Girl queen. Keiko Mizutani plays the ambitious Keiko. "She is one of the hottest, what we would call in America, a B-movie star, Queen of the Bs," said O'Donnell of the



financial hole while being hounded by the director of a rival station. When the weather girl she hires turns up sick as the show's about to go on the air, Keiko steps in, does the report, and concludes by flashing her panties.

Many of these films are manga-based, including the bizarre horror film, BAPTISM OF BLOOD, a lot of Grand Guignol Japanese

pretty actress. "She's an absolute top actress for the kind of movies that are eagerly devoured by the critics." The popular actress also appears in THE LADIES' PHONE SEX CLUB.

After reading the script for the sequel, WEATHER WOMAN RETURNS, called WEATHERGIRL in Japan, Mizutani decided against being in the second film.

She was replaced by Misa Aika who had appeared in SPLATTERNAILED BLOOD. Written and directed by Tomoaki Hosoyama who helmed WEATHER WOMAN, the new film is a retread on the original theme. The Keiko character returns as a school girl who decides to take over the reins of her dead father's TV station. Faced with heavy debt, Keiko Nakada tries desperately to pull the regional station out of its financial hole while being hounded by the director of a rival station. When the weather girl she hires turns up sick as the show's about to go on the air, Keiko steps in, does the report, and concludes by flashing her panties.

An arresting scene from THE  
#900 GIRL... one in a series from  
THE LADIES PHONE SEX  
CLUB.





BIG BOOBS BUSTER (above) is a campy tale about the small size of a college student's breasts, and her revenge on those who are more well-endowed than she. (B) The video cover for the gory BAPTISM OF BLOOD. (Opposite) "Mo the Ninja" in LAND OF THE DEVIL.

style. An actress is forced to leave the stage after her face is scarred and leg injured. For twenty years, she lives alone, except for her daughter, Sakura. Her mother claims the father was a white man who passed through town years before. One day the strange Dr. Wells visits her mother and Sakura sees them operating on a brain and discussing plans to transplant her mother's brain into her head to gain an unblemished body. The operation is a graphic display of blood and gore via a strange machine. The Hitchcockian twist ending and this sequence should have entitled the film a berth on the cable channels - I suspect that if it had been a European import it would have attracted a wider audience.

"Most American don't look at movies unless there are white people in them," said O'Donnell. "World peace through shared popular culture is our logo. BAPTISM OF BLOOD was quirky. It's non-formulaic. It just keeps you on your toes. It was gory, it was graphic, it was a good story. I think you get into some of the characters in the thing."

## "We're not talking 'foreign films.' We're talking pure entertainment movies."

One of the strangest titles in the series is BIG BOOBS BUSTER, a school-gift romp which speaks to the possible hidden agenda of young women whose cup size doesn't measure up to the male fantasy. Horumi Kai plays Masako, a college girl in love with Eli Bands. When she declares her love, Bands merely laughs at her, explaining that although she is attractive, smart, and athletic, her breasts are too small. Angry, Horumi dons a mask and leather outfit and becomes Big Boobs Buster, attacking other,

more well-endowed, college students, and taking molds of their breasts. At one point, she is frustrated by a woman with a steel bra who is dating Bands. Finally, with her athletic abilities, and with help from the track team, Horumi regains her self-confidence.

"This is an example of the gothy genre," laughed O'Donnell. "It's just pure manga chic. The story, the concept, is bizarre. Her boyfriend says he won't date her because her tits are too small so she gets the hang up about her small tits. She then gets jealous of girls with big tits so she runs around and captures them, takes off their clothes, and then makes plastic molds of their boobs, which she then lines up in her bedroom like trophies. When her parents come into her bedroom they don't notice anything odd. It's zany. Who thought of this. There's a lot of interesting stuff out there that is fun to watch."

Based on another manga by Shungiku Uchida, CLOSE YOUR EYES AND HOLD ME focuses on a strange triangle. While diving home Amane, a young business man, accidentally hits Hanabusa, an attractive woman played by Kumiko Tokada.

"Kumiko is a hot actress, one of those beautiful women who is in a couple of movies like CLOSE YOUR EYES AND HOLD ME," said O'Donnell. "Most people in Asia know her and almost no one in America has ever heard of her." After she leaves the hos-

pital, Amane discovers that there is more to Hanabusa than meets the eye; she works in a hermaphrodite club. The two shake up an affair, which results in Amane breaking off his relationship with Jun (Natsue Yoshimura), a pretty coworker. Despondent, Jun confronts Hanabusa, who seduces the young woman.

"CLOSE YOUR EYES AND HOLD ME is like THE CRYING GAME of Japan," O'Donnell advised, "but unlike THE CRYING GAME, there is no particular mystery that a guy falls in love with a trans-





Masaru Tsushima as  
Otsutsu, a woman  
possessed by a spirit  
and turned into a  
woman-shade.



Legend of the  
Devil is a classic  
yokai movie...  
with mystical  
swords.

sexual. Basically his life is ripped apart because he's about to be married and he meets this "woman," one of the most beautiful women he's ever seen in his life, and falls in love with her but he realizes she is a bisexual shemale. That's based on a very popular woman's romance comic. In Japan, whatever the group, there's a comic out there."

The honor genre is again represented by THE HAUNTED LANTERN, an erotic combination of honor and the Samurai genre. Set in the Sengoku period, the film features the beautiful set design period Japanese films are famous for. Otsutsu, a woman betrayed by her lover, Shinoburo, kills herself. Centuries later, she is reborn and falls in love with her sister's fiancée, the reincarnation of Shinoburo. Once again, in despair, she commits suicide only to return as a vengeful spirit to haunt her lover.

"The supernatural elements are tied in with the eroticism," said O'Donnell. "It transports you to a different world. It forces you to see things that you don't normally see in an American movie. When are you going to see an American movie about Samurais, ghosts, and geishas, and things like that? Jerry [Bruckheimer] hasn't been doing many of those lately."

The director of the HAUNTED LANTERN, Masaru Tsushima, was also behind LEGEND OF THE DEVIL, a samurai-ninja tale. The blade-slashing film finds several clans battling for possession of two mystical swords during the Edo period. When one of the swords is stolen from the Hojo Clan, Princess Moyu asks swordsman Shunnosuke Sakou to help recover the relic. Unknown to everyone, a demon is behind the scheme to unit the two weapons.

In 1993, Japanese cinema launched a new franchise, ZERO WOMAN, a Japanese version of LA FEMME NINJA. Notsuki Ogaswa starred as an agent for a top-secret branch of the Japanese police force known as Level Zero. Her assignment is to track down a vicious serial killer who butchers women. Since then, at least six



sassin to kill her but the two becomes lovers before again striking each other.

In *ZERO WOMAN: THE ACCUSED* Mai Taichira takes over the role of Rei. When men start turning up dead, the finger of guilt points to Rei and she finds herself hunted by her own forces. She must find the killer before Levi ZERO brings her down.

Cultural idiosyncrasies add a note of interest to these films while the action sequences translate in any language. From the bizarre to the exciting, Asia Pulp Cinema offers a chance to catch a diversity of films you won't see on HBO. □

*ZERO WOMAN* is a James Bond-esque series about a modern-day assassin for the Japanese police.

Films have been added to the series including *ZERO WOMAN: DANGEROUS GAME, THE HUNTED, ASSASSIN LOVERS, and THE ACCUSED*. "Think of a female James Bond," said O'Donnell, and you have *ZERO WOMAN*. "The films are set in modern day Tokyo. You're checking out what's happening in today's Tokyo. You're there watching a woman who is an assassin for the police. Basically, *Zero Woman*'s job is to kill off people the police want dead but can't legally arrest, so you've got a corrupt government in the sense that they're doing the right thing, but they're doing it wrong. They're ridding the world of criminals, but they're doing it illegally by hiring assassins to kill them off. She's a female James Bond kicking butt. Different people play the character like Bond, you have different people bringing their interpretations to the character so it never gets stale."

The first film out of the Asia Pulp Cinema gate is *ZERO WOMAN II: ASSASSIN LOVERS*. Kumiko Takada stars as Rei, *Zero Woman*. She had appeared as the hermaphrodite in *CLOSE YOUR EYES AND HOLD ME*. Anxious to leave her clandestine activities behind, Rei must handle one more assignment. The syndicate, however, hires Katsumura, another as-



**Not only the most sought-after  
actress from Singapore, she is also  
one of the most controversial figures  
her country has ever seen.**

# **BEATRICE CH**

**Exclusive interview  
by Craig Reid**



JA



**I**t's three a.m., temperature in the '90s, humidity that shames Maura, billows of smoke everywhere, flames intermittently bursting out of three large fire pits, and mosquitoes sucking our very souls dry. Then suddenly, amidst a wall of flame (no CGI here), an enigmatic vision of beauty rockets up from one of the fire pits. At the peak of her maiden thirty-foot ascent, she spreads her black-clad arms, throws a silver dart through the body of a would-be assailant, hovers in a cool pose, then gently flops to the ground like a mystical snowflake at the dawn of winter.

Making her American film debut in *LOST TIME*, Beatrice Chan, as her friends call her, Ben-Bei, has arrived. This is my introduction to arguably the biggest and boldest thing to hit Singapore since it was dubbed a British colony in 1819. Just south of six feet tall, this alluring anomaly from Asia is as cool as her demeanor. Mark my words people, save this song. This babe is more daring than Madonna, one of the smartest actresses you've ever read about, and if you're in Singapore at the time she's President, "Take me to your leader," would be your living end.

I'm halfway around the world in Hong Kong, on the set of the To Seng Media (Asia) Limited's *LOST TIME*, watching MORTAL KOMBAT'S Robin Show in his directorial debut. I'm watching Beatrice being unhooked from the wire-emasculated harness. Based on what I just saw with Choi, fifteen takes of being snappishly yanked out of a fire pit, but still beaming with smiles and moving around like a ballerina, this must be something she's been doing for years. She gracefully glides towards me, as she has some free time amidst her fourth consecutive eighteen-hour day's night shoot, to grouchily speak with a magazine that is outlawed in her country. If the general populace knew she was talking to us, she would become, yet again, a marked woman for being true to her convictions and open about her background.

Removing her jacket, there are giant green and orange bruises all over her torso. "Wow," she calmly exclaims. "Must be from the wires. I usually bruise purple so I have to take where this bright orange, yellow, and green comes from. Must be really deep."

I immediately fire a barrage of questions. "Does it hurt?" How

long have you been doing this, the stunts, fights, and wins gaps?"

With a beaming smile that lights up the smoke-filled, pipe-laden dungeons of the former Hong Kong water purification plant at Lek On Pui, she coquettishly, in perfect English, answers, "This is my first action film, and just now was the first time I've ever been in a harness. It's cool, floating around like that," looking at her harness. "These are weird looking, huh?" Touching them "Ooh, tender ice."

She refines medical attention, shakes her head, and says, "I've been told that in order to gain respect from the stuntmen in Hong Kong, you never complain about pain, so if it hurts, I just say 'No room, it's nothing.' I was pretty nervous never being in a harness before. I've often wondered just how much body control you can have in those things. Everyone told me different things about the isolation you can feel in them. But the truth is, I was afraid of pain and have a very low threshold of physical pain (laughs). I'm not a tough guy but if it hurts, I don't grumble or yelp, I say, 'It doesn't hurt,' then go off somewhere and say, 'Ow.' I held my arms over the wires to keep stable because they wanted me to fly up and spread my arms out. So when they jerked up the wire, it dug into my arms and when I spread them, the wires would roll and snap up."

Climbing up catscratched stairs and ladders, we make our way outside where the air is cleaner and a slight breeze is blowing off the South China Sea. Many years ago, Chinese scientists felt they had a solution to Hong Kong's growing fresh-water shortage problems. Larger than any cube factory you've seen, they built an oceanfront water desalination plant, hoping that changing sea water into drinking water could be economically feasible. After flooding the lower levels with sea water, it failed miserably. Now that towering structure of twisted steel and broken windows has become the most sought-after film set in Hong Kong. In fact, on the other side of the plant, Jackie Chan is right-shooting *BUSH HOUR 2*. Only problem is, the water that flooded into the lower levels is still there. So you have to put up with the breeding mosquitoes and always be careful where you step.

Drinking some sort of sultry, red bean paste concoction she begins, "At fourteen, I got it into my brain I wanted to be an actor, went to London at sixteen and saw my first stage production, *M. BUTTERFLY*, with Anthony Hopkins. I was blown away and it only



# "I'm called ev as an actress."

Iod is intellectually superior

"This thing lasted for about seven years. Every other week, the press photographed us, labeled us as incredibly smart kids, and every other month, we'd have these tests again to see if our IQ had dropped... (bright)... to see if we've gone stupid. I'm opposed to this sort of genetic programming which happens a lot in a country like Singapore. It's the politics of Lee Quan Yu. It has deep elitist meanings, trying to breed a class of people to lead the country (jokes). But come on, look at me! Do I look like I'm capable of that? If things went the way they [planned] I would've gone to Ox-Bridge (Oxford or Cambridge), Yale, or some other Ivy League school, got my degree in politics or economics, returned to Singapore, and sat on some high-end board, become a super adviser. But I didn't, I chose my own path."

"There were thirty of us and everyone knew who we were. I announced that I wanted to be an actor, can you imagine my family? Not my parents; they are the coolest people in the world. There was just a huge disappointment that I was not going to fulfill that expectation. In my eyes, I want to be Aung San Suu Kyi (the controversial and popular leader of a Burmese democratic movement under house arrest by the Burmese government). That is who I would want to be."

"It is truly refreshing to meet someone whose respect is not misplaced or misguided. I ask Bee-Bee, at some point, when her acting brings her fame in Singapore, would she find herself leaning towards doing what is expected of her? Where she would be in a position to have people listen to her, would she get involved in political motivation, and make changes in Singapore, and become like her hero, Aung San?"

Bee-guan, "I really haven't thought that far ahead, or maybe I just don't expect that much from myself. My ambition has always been not so much that I will be a successful person or achieve such widespread fame, but I want to be able to look back on my life [and see] a body of work that I would be proud of. It's not that my acting would be amazing, but the entire collaborative effort would be wonderful. And hopefully my life can be an example. I might have failed and had a lot of bleak moments, but I tried." (She begins giggling) "I might be an immoral example to people, I don't always do the right thing. I've surely floated a lot of Christian standards by what I do, but it's just by endeavor."

Upon graduating with honors from the highly prestigious Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London in 1996, and be-

re-emphasized what I wanted to do."

After a battery of required scholastic exams, auditions, and elimination rounds, Chua attended the Guild Hall School of Music and Drama for three years. She then worked in England for a year, only to return home to Singapore, where she has worked for the past four years.

"I do film, TV, and theater, but it's not about what I prefer doing, but the material. I just love acting and it's always been the script, director, cast, and oftentimes, the crew that makes a project worthwhile for me. Film and TV give you exposure but it's theater that makes you the actor. I've trained to be an actor on stage and friend it teaches you a discipline and respect for your craft. It trains you to think of your work and not just to see it as something you do or as a job. You learn a system and process and I think that no body can do that. I've tried to do other things."

Like what?

She leans forward. "The only other thing I wanted to do with my life was to be a doctor, because I wanted a life where I could contribute and wasn't so self-indulgent. At one point, I quit drama school to pursue that. It was my first year at drama school and I'd done enough breathing exercise, and being the coke blue, and I was tired of that. I marched into my principal's office saying, 'I've had it, this is the most self-indulgent, introspective...it's the wank.' She said, 'Be-

fore you pass judgement on being an actress, finish the term.' So I agreed to that. And one strange morning, I woke up and had some clarity. I realized that if you just want to contribute, you would find a way of doing it. So with acting you can contribute. You can make somebody laugh, dream, inspire people's imagination, give someone hope. I can't exactly explain why I do what I do; I just know that I would be miserable doing something else."

Speaking with Bee-Bee, you quickly realize that she really is a genuine lady of the arts. Often times in Hollywood, passion for acting is not as important as the glitter. Chua is a refreshing breeze, yet little did I know that this breeze is really a tornado in disguise. This hasn't come from acting, but it's probably her educational background that has laid the foundation for her incisively ridiculous nature.

She reminisces, "When I was nine, I [entered] what was called the 'Gifted Education Program,' created by the Ministry of Education in Singapore. It's an accelerated learning program and, through a series of rigorous IQ tests, they weeded out one hundred students in Singapore. It's the idea of genetic programming. We were supposedly more intellectually advanced and so we were put in accelerated learning programs, taught more things, and taught in more depth. I'm quite opposed to that. I don't think at age nine you can really tell which



# Everything from a whore to lacking credibility I try not to take my life too seriously."

fore returning to Singapore a year later, she did films for the BBC, MTV in Europe and frequented the British stage, ranging from Shakespeare's RICHARD III and AS YOU LIKE IT to contemporary classics like Samuel Beckett's WAITING FOR GODOT. An accomplished dancer and singer back in Singapore, Chia has created a furor of attention for her outstanding stage performances (MOMI BEING, THE SNEEZE), film appearances (STORIES ABOUT LOVE, 2389 FRIDAY NIGHTS) and versatile roles on TV (UNDER ONE ROOF, PHUA CHU KANG). Chia is also the most sought-after Singaporean actress. As of this story, she is getting a true test of gate working on LOST TIME, an over-the-top, stylized, far-out action romp which also stars Robin Shou.

LOST TIME is a movie within a movie entitled RED TROUSERS, an action docudrama focusing on the dangerous trials and man-blowing tribulations of the extremely daredevil acrobatics of the Hong Kong stuntman. The credo behind the vision and reason for making RED TROUSERS and subsequently LOST TIME is respectfully reflected in the words of Bruce Lee: "In every passionate pursuit, the pursuant counts more than the object being pursued." Chia comments, "When I saw that as part of the reason for doing the docudrama part of this film RED TROUSERS, it sums up the sort of thing that I truly abide by. Acting and life truly are about the pursuit and the adventure of the journey (laughs). The problems in life start when you get [too] serious in what you are doing. Sometimes I have a tendency to do that, and one really needs to have a reality check to work things out."

"But on a personal level, it's my parents, and more so my father, that influence me. He's reliable, dependable, and a very kind man. When I was studying in England, he'd write telling me how to get through things. I've kept all his letters and when I'm faced with things I'm unsure of, I'll sit back and try to imagine how he would handle things. Like my father, I'm totally against idleness, slothiness, unkindness, ingratitude, arrogance, and rudeness. I'm somewhat of a workaholic from that. And if I ever believe I'm better than I really am, he'd be the first to let me know."

Chia being from a country with such strict moral codes, or if you look at from a different perspective, harsh censorship laws, I was concerned that the subject of nudity might not have only been deemed inappropriate but also crass. "Well," she grins easily, "I just did a film in Singapore that made the front page of every newspaper in town, where I did a love-making

scene with a man's hand cupping my breast!"

Entitled 2389 FRIDAY NIGHT and directed by the young upstart, Singaporean director Galen Mei, it was actor Mark Richmon who had the "Bent" in his bonnet.

Chia continues, "That's a huge...it could be a real mistake for any actress. [Singapore is] a very conservative society, pornography is illegal, and you can still be arrested for doing plays that involve things like homosexuality and scenes of other issues. I think the problems are more social rather than artistic. People have problems with me when I do things like that. I also did this magazine cover (FHM) which shows my naked back. People had problems with that, too."

It's important to get a perspective here. Take all the stuff that Madonna has done over the past ten years, the photo shoots, the music videos, the clothing, and the smooching off. Now imagine if she were to do that in America during the '80s or early '90s. Now you are getting an idea of what Chia is doing.

She adds, "I'm called everything from a

whore to lacking credibility as an actress. I try not to get too perturbed by it, and try not to take my life too seriously."

Which begs the question. What if she were to do explicit nudity in an American film? First of all, would she do it, and see and, what would happen to her hook in Singapore?

"Well," she states, "I wouldn't get in trouble with the law, but socially I'd have lots of trouble. The press would go crazy. But take a film like WINGS OF THE DOVE, where Helena Bonham Carter has this nude love scene at the film's end. To me, it's possibly the most powerful scene I've ever seen. If I was offered that role, I would do it. Once, during an interview in Singapore, I said this, and it was taken out of context, and the press had a field day with it. It will probably happen if this article gets over there. But I don't mind what you write."

"I'm used to it. I do think, to a certain degree, that tabloids want to run a story and want to sell an article. The more set-up and sensational it is, the more copies it will sell. It's about manipulating a situation."





o. Why should I share about my breast cancer? I mean?

"I already have a reputation in Singapore for shooting off my mouth. My husband and I got divorced three years ago for a so-called *face past*. But actually I mean what I say. I didn't like the way of living the man during those three years and basically, my mouth is unassisted by me. I'm an attention seeker and I know it will get into the press. I speak my mind. Don't get me wrong, I do employ a great deal of tact and hold my tongue on some things, but when there is something I'm most passionate about and believe very strongly about, I will say a lot about it. I remember mentioning in my very first big newspaper, back-page interview that I suffered from anorexia and bulimia when I was thirteen and did so for many years. The press went crazy about it."

"It was a bit weird at first, but then after a while the female journalists were supportive of me; and then they decided that they had to change their tactics. And I still attended for interviews about it today. People write me and mothers try to reach me, telling me their daughters were in hospital and they'd like me to go there and talk to them, not necessarily the girls, but the mothers themselves. [And] sometimes they could talk to who has recovered and someone who had a problem with it. It gives them some sort of hope that their kids can be healthy too and can bring awareness to the situation. People say to my parents, 'Why did she say something so embarrassing like that or admit something like that?' I shouldn't even be bothered by that."

Chia is also a strong proponent for breast cancer awareness, helping intellectually disabled children, and raising money for

hospices and hospitals. She is deeply ferocious about education, awareness, and kindness. She also talks a lot about safe sex. "And that is what I get into a lot of problems and trouble with," she boldly commands. "Very few people in Singapore would be caught dead talking about this sort of stuff, let alone just talking about safe sex and protection, because it implies you are having sex outside of marriage, you're promiscuous, and obviously you have had a bad experience before. So they say, 'Why are you advocating the use of condoms?' I'm a big proponent of that and I know the Catholic Church is not fond of me."

"But my words to the press have never been about who sucks or who is bad or bad-mouthing anybody. I hope I'm not as petty as that. It's having an opinion about a specific subject. I don't see myself as a rebel; I'm a very peace-loving person. But then again, I'm not uncomfortable with your take on it."

"I like harmony and peace within people and within themselves. I tend to say what I feel but hopefully not in a chidish, attention-seeking way. But when I think something is not right, then I have to say it. There are too many of us who are cowardly or too afraid to be angled out as not one of us. I have become comfortable with not taking the beaten track. If I was so afraid of disownment or afraid of what people say of me, it would be impossible of me not fulfilling any expectations that I have of myself. Then I'd simply have just gone off to Oxford or Cambridge, come back with my degree, gone straight to the bar, go to the top as a lawyer, and become a big barrister, earned lots of money and driven a BMW. That would have been the expected beaten track for me and what other people expected of me."

"Look at this film. We do twenty-four-hour shoots, no toilets, needles for lunch. You really have to love what you are doing. If you did this for all the wrong reasons fame and money, which in Singapore doesn't exist, then you wouldn't last six months and you'd never finish drama school. Finishing drama school doesn't guarantee you anything. For me, school was sixteen hours of class and learning a day, seven days a week, every day. It's all about love and passion for your work."

#### LOST TIME: THE MOVIE

LOST TIME is a story about the covert career of one of the most dangerous Forest Devils in modern history, Evan Ni Zher (Shiao) and how his love for Silver (Chai) changed his life. Historically, the Forest Devils were the most feared sect of vigilante assassins ever known to roam the Earth. Today, these clandestine slayers of evil surface when power-hungry criminals perpetuate henges of cosmopolitan carnage. Evan's stylized story will rock the very foundation of the Forest Devil verse. With marvelous displays of steel-shielding bewitchment, only a poet could touch the edge of the Evan mystery, a mystery seeped in romance, treachery, and romance. Like Evan, Silver is also an assassin who believes in the righteousness of her work. She has a coy sense of humor and believes in the sanctity of love. Although terminally pretty and armed with a gentle nature, she is not afraid to voice her opinion. Her fighting abilities are gracefully smooth, yet devastatingly brutal.

Captivated by her grace and beauty, Evan is not annoyed when Silver is assigned to essentially be his body-attendant. As their verbal chess matches manifest in a series of punks and sarcastic remarks, their partnership culminates with a deep-rooted, emotional attachment that eventually becomes Evan's sole driving force.

Chia tells us about her character, how she relates to Silver, and what she feels is the role's biggest challenge, which ultimately reflects back to the devotion to her craft, wrapped in philosophical tenets. She gleefully points out, "Silver? She's wonderful! It's rare you get a character you really love, adore, and look forward to playing. There are many things out there that are pay-the-manuscript-and-complete-shots, but I think she's really

cool. She's everything you can get, as an actor's fantasy; a character that's a real hero, but not so much her sword-fighting ability, although Silver does have wonderful fighting skills, but a character who has true strength of spirit and is capable of love. This is a romance, and her function in the story is to be the woman Evan falls in love with and who changes him. That appeals to me when you have love that is deep passion and not so much of a sexual nature."

"I believe the capacity of love like that still exists. I believe in the strong fighting spirit and in love being a means of clarity. I know how that story originated and where it comes from, the screenwriter, and his evidence for that belief is right before me. So with that, it's not hard for me to believe. When the writer tried to sell it to me, I'm thinking that he's preaching to the converted."

"The charm in this film is the action and martial arts. I wasn't prepared for that and never realized how much focus you really need for it. I have no experience or training in martial arts or action films, so this came as a helluva experience. I tried to find a way of working, a kind of vocabulary, style, posturing, and movements of which I'm hugely unfamiliar with. And that's where, as an actor, within a few days, you must pick it up and do it and look like you've done it for a long time. I have to hold the sword, punch, kick, and make it look like a real martial artist with just a week or so of training. So you can tell that the stunt doubles did a lot for work for me [laughs], and yes, even the ones dressed up like guys."

To find out more about LOST TIME, the other characters, and related information, check out the Shockwave award-winning website dedicated to the film at [www.losttimethemovie.com](http://www.losttimethemovie.com).

She introspectively adds, "An actress doesn't want to be confronted by her limitations all of the time, and knowing that I couldn't do a kick high enough could be a little bit demoralizing. So the biggest challenge for me was not being disappointed in myself. I, as a person, have high expectations. I've always wanted to not only meet those expectations, but to also surpass them. Everything you ask of me, I must do that and more. And this is maybe the first time I've felt that I might not have met them. And that is a tough thing for an actor to think about and face." □



BY CRAIG REID

# CYNTHIA ROTHROCK

## HOW A U.S. MARTIAL ARTIST EARNED RESPECT IN HONG KONG

Cynthia Rothrock was the first Caucasian woman to play a lead fighter and character in a Hong Kong film. It's only now that the Hong Kong action craze is finally hitting its stride in American film, a stride initiated by the steps of actresses like Cynthia Rothrock.

It's on the set of the independent film *REDEMPTION*. Cynthia isn't doing many fights in this film but that's okay. She appears to be making a transition from action to drama. And why not? Happily married and with a child, she's done almost 50 action films. I sat down with Cynthia and asked her not only to talk to us about her latest film but to walk down memory lane a bit. She shared her experiences as an actor/fighter in Hong Kong, at a time when Hong Kong film was in a veritable renaissance; she could easily have been labelled a female Michelangelo, because, after all, fighting is all about being an artist, and Cynthia is a martial artist that started training at the age of 13.

"My first style was *teng see so*, a Korean style (the same style as Chuck Norris) and I got my black belt from that. When I was young, I enjoyed physical things: dance, sports. But I'd always lose interest. Then my girlfriend's parents were studying martial arts and used to own a health club. So on Sunday we'd go and watch them practice, and I thought that was something interesting to do. I tried it, and after two months, I realized I didn't like it. Plus, I was the only girl in the class. I felt very intimidated. I couldn't get myself to shoot, which was a very masculine thing to do at the time. I loved the fighting and hated the forms (set of movements that must be performed in correct sequence). So I thought, 'That's it.'

Then one day, her instructor gave a speech that Rothrock thought was directed at her. "He said, 'If you want to be good, you have to practice every day.' It's so simple but for some reason, it really got to me. So I started practicing every day and started getting good at it. After my first belt, an orange belt, my teacher had me compete in form competitions against black belts and I took second place. It was the first time I had ever won anything in my life, so I thought, 'Maybe I have a natural talent,' and so I started really liking the martial arts."

It never occurred to her that she could get into film until a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken whetted her appetite.

She recalls, "After I moved out of Pennsylvania and went to California, I got involved in cohosting a public-access TV show

called MARTIAL ARTS FOR KICKS. I enjoyed being in front of and talking to the camera, and there was never a script. From that I got cast to do a Kentucky Fried Chicken commercial. They flew me first class, [paid for] a great hotel, and paid me \$10,000.00 for one day. I thought, 'Whoa, this is fun!' But at that point in my life, my main focus was to be number one and remain undefeated for five years as a Weapons Form lady champion, and I wasn't going to think of anything until my five years was up. This was in my second year of competition."

However, after her third year of competition, she was told that *Sensational Films* (a Hong Kong film company) was looking for a new Caucasian fighter to fight a new Bruce Lee and they were auditioning men in L.A. Intrigued, Rothrock decided to attend the audition. Several people at the audition recognized her from competition and pointed her out to the Chinese producers who then allowed her to audition. After several grueling rounds of fighting, weapon demonstrations and self defense maneuvers, they signed her to a contract.

"They signed me up instead of a guy," she adds. "That was about 1982. So 1984 comes along, and I still haven't done a picture with them. But now I've become more popular in martial arts, four times number one. A San Francisco newspaper did a story on me, and because of the story, Peter Jeunings from ABC News wanted to come down and shoot something with me. Of course I told them that I had a contract, wanted to do movies, and that two years had gone by, and maybe they didn't want to do it with me. They ended the piece saying, 'Look out, Hong Kong, here she comes!'

Sammo Hung (from CBS's MARTIAL LAW) saw it in Hong Kong and started asking, "Who is this girl?" So he bought my contract from *Sensational Films* and brought me over to Hong Kong in June of 1986. I thought that I probably won't be a famous actress, so I'm just going over to do this film, hope I get on the poster, and one day I can tell my kids about it and they can say, "Look what mommy did." That first picture, YES MADAM, took seven and a half months to do, and I wasn't prepared for it."

As it turns out, Rothrock starred opposite future screen queen Michelle Yeoh (then Michelle Khan) in one of her earlier

films, as two female cops searching for a piece of microfilm that could take down a triad empire. With a cameo by Sammo, it was directed by Corey Yuen, action director for X-MEN, LETHAL WEAPON 4, and KISS OF THE DRAGON. Immediately after YES MADAM, Rothrock was offered a role in another Sammo vehicle, SHANGHAI EXPRESS (aka MILLIONAIRE'S EXPRESS). By this time, she had completed her goal of being the undisputed fumas champion for five years in a row and decided to stop competing and start a new career in film.

"I was the first white lady to play a good guy lead, because white guys were always the villains. I always used to thank God that I'm not a villain like the guys, because they used to get the hell beaten out of them. But the key was, if you lived in Hong Kong, and you were a good martial artist, you could find work as the villain, because it was rare they'd bring someone over to do it. Only thing is you wouldn't get paid much."

"But it was definitely to my advantage to be a blonde female," she fondly continues.

"Especially since I could

do martial arts. That is probably why I became successful over there. In the first film, I had a lot of dangerous stunts and got hurt many times, but the people saw that I did it. So on the set, they respected me, and they saw I could take hard hits. You've got to be able to take them hard as well as give them hard, and I would try anything. I think it was easier at that time because I was such an idiot. They had never seen an American woman over there who could fight that well."

"Of course, knowing martial arts, kung-fu, the different styles and weapons, helped, because they could show me something and right away I could do it. I didn't need to re-enact it and they could show it once and I'd know it. But one thing I was so fortunate about is that I really didn't have to go through all the auditions. They'd just call me and I'd go do it."

"And when I came back to the States, I had such a strong fan-base popularity that the independent people knew they could make money on me, so once again, I didn't have to audition for these either. Thank God. I hate auditioning."

But more than doing films in Hong Kong, Rothrock learned a lot about life and herself while living overseas. "I learned to become independent and it made me a responsible and mature girl. I learned that I could go anywhere on my own and not be afraid and be successful. I lost a lot of fear. I was afraid to do some of the stunts but when I saw Jackie Chan do his stuff, I'd say, 'I can do this!'"

"What really blew me away is that their choreography is amazing, they're geniuses of martial art pictures, and I was so totally impressed that they would come up with these moves using any apparatus or any room. It helped me expand my martial art thinking for fighting. Like when I first went over there I was a traditional martial artist, so when they had me do a kick and I'd say, 'Yeah, but this is the way it should be done.' They'd just say, 'trust us...we film it will look different.' Of course they were right. Things were different."

"In America, the shooting schedule is a lot shorter; you don't have time. In Hong Kong, it can take one day [just] to do the wire rigging, and they like to see more of the skill, what you can do. It's not realistic fighting, so you can go on for a ten-minute fight scene, smash someone off the roof, and keep going. I like the Hong Kong style; it takes true skill. In America, you can take any actor or actress, teach her a punch, kick, and make her look real. It's harder to fake it over there. Plus, they are geniuses of editing. They can take a [stunt] double and make it look right. I always had a man doubling for me in Hong Kong. When I came back to the States and did films and I'd be asked if I had a stunt double I'd say,

"Yeah, a man." They'd have a man jump off a four-story building in slow motion; you'd see this guy in a wig, then I'd lead and I'm like 'Oh, my God.' So I learned about the film industry, acting, and it was a training ground. If I'd started out in America, I would have died."

She shares, "My toughest film, and actually what I feel are my best fights, was LADY RE-



**PORTR**TER... I had a scene where I'm hanging out a window of a moving truck holding on with just my leg. I asked if someone could brace my leg with something so I don't fall out when the truck is moving. They are just like, 'No, no, no. Just hold on.' You want to talk about holding my leg really tight? I'm impressed with that because there are things in there that I didn't think I could do, and when I was doing them I didn't think they were good, but when I saw them on film, it wasn't too bad. Very memorable.

"As long as I was willing to try a stunt, they'd be patient with me and keep doing it as long as necessary to get the shot. Where here, after a few times, they get nervous with the time. Their mistake is also funny. One time I got hit in the face with a sword and it caught me right on the side of the nose and my face got this

with the bumbling member of his force (Rothrock). With a failed marriage, and a child he feels a desperate need to impress, Wilson is obsessed with getting enough money to purchase a house. One day, a mission goes awry, that is the day I'm on set.

"Actually, Den came up to me a couple of years ago saying he had this script,"

After Ellen dies, Wilson is fired. Desolate and broke, he agrees to become a bodyguard to a friend, played by *Playmats* Carrie Stevens, who is a drug addict, hooking to support her habit. She introduces him to a nightclub owner and drug dealer (Chris Penn). Soon, the former cop is living a criminal's life; yet now he has the money to achieve his goals. Penn plans the ultimate bank heist, yet chickens out, leaving Wilson on his own to see his old SWAT buddies threatened by his new criminal "friends."

"Now Den has a tough decision to make," explained the ever-vigilant film's director, Art Camacho. With a slight grin, he reflects, "Den conceived this film about four years ago when we were filming *LIGHTENING STRIKE: RING OF FIRE 3* together. We were on the set, kicked around the ideas, wrote a little

"As an exercise, martial arts is a win-win situation because you also learn self-defense, and maybe one day, you'll have to use it to protect yourself or one of your loved ones."

## *"I'll be doing martial arts at 75. If I don't do these things...I might not be in shape."*

big went on it and my eyes were all watery. The director comes over to me and says, 'Oh, I like your nose better this way.' So if you wanted to do action over there, you had to be prepared to get hurt, and when you do, you can't cry, whine, or anything like that, you had to be strong-willed. Once, I got kicked in the jaw so hard that it split my internal ear open and it started bleeding badly. I went to the doctor, then that afternoon I'm back on set, shooting. That's the risk over there. I almost had my face burned off in Indiana. I thought, 'I'm going to get killed doing these things.' At least things are safer for me here."

The nostalgic hype around *REDEMPTION* is that it's the first time that Cynthia (voiced as the "Lady Dragon" from several of her previous American films) and Den "The Dragon" Wilson have appeared together in a film. It is produced by David DePalma of Dimension Films; also, action director Art Camacho returns, who helmed two of Dimension's previous works, *POINT DOOM* and *GANGLAND*. Wilson portrays an L.A. cop and leader of an elite team who is beginning a romance

Rothrock recalls. "Originally, this part was a male part, and he wanted to change it into a female part and he spoke to the writers and made the changes. It took a while to get this project together, the financing and everything. Then one day I saw him and he said, 'Oh, we're getting ready to shoot this movie.' Well, at that time, I was five and a half months pregnant and I was thinking, 'I don't think so.' But I asked when did he want to shoot this, and it was at the point that you couldn't really tell I was pregnant. Luckily, it is being made now, so I can do it. So obviously, we have been talking about this for a long time."

"My character's name is 'Ellen Murphy,' a member of this SWAT team, and she's pretty much one of the guys, doesn't take any crap from anyone. But at the same time she's funny and has an attraction for Den's character. She hasn't had a lucky life with men because of the hours she keeps and being a powerful woman. So a situation develops where they get chance to get together and find mutual attraction, and just as that takes place, they get in a SWAT situation."

treatment. Basically it's about someone who is a good guy, becomes a bad guy, then becomes a good guy again. He redeems himself or finds redemption."

When I ask why this film is so special to him, he shares, "I've worked on twenty-some films of Den's and done most of the choreography, directed the fights, but I've never directed him as an actor. I've always felt he has potential as an actor. So I'm more passionate about this film than many others because he really did it all as an actor, and the same with Cynthia."

"I've choreographed her films and done stunts, but never directed her as an actress. To have the Lady Dragon and Den 'The Dragon' together really moves me. Her acting also blew me away. And I truly want to emphasize Den and Cynthia had good chemistry."

Word comes over, it is time to take out Rothrock's character. Decked out in her fully destroyed postal uniform, Rothrock returns. I'm anxious to finish up discussing with Cynthia things about philosophy, how martial arts changed her life, and her expectations in film today. She has been very careful in avoiding de-

ing nudity or anything racy.

"The closest I've ever come to nudity is in *SWORN TO JUSTICE*, where I have this love scene and had on a g-string, but it didn't show nudity. I really don't have anything against it if it is called for in the script, but I get a lot of scripts with a shower scene and gratuitous nudity. I won't do it. Ah yes, but about that cover five years ago," she demurely smiles, referring to her revealing photographs in our magazine a few years back. "Let's just say that it was indeed a big change for me and it really shocked a lot of people. At one point, people thought that, 'Oh yes, she's this tough karate girl.' I wanted to show that I had a softer and more sensual side. I have no regrets doing that."

Originally the script had no fights in it but when Cynthia came on board some were added. "Actually," she notes, "I do prefer to do lots of fights, and that is what people like to see me do. But on the other hand, I'm getting roles offered to me as an actress, with no action. And that makes me feel good—that I don't have to do just fighting. I'd love to do a TV series. I've a lot of fans and experience and women seem to be a focal point for that right now."

With a long sigh for what could have been, she continues, "In American films, fights are more realistic, and there are not many stunts, so in this film the challenge comes from working on the character. In Hong Kong, you don't get a script, and you'd get your lines right before it was shot, and you don't know who your character really is. So you just wing it."

"You are more concerned about the action," she states, "because it's so dangerous and strenuous. But in America, [I] don't have to concern [myself] so much with it because it's easy for me. So, although I do more of the acting, the martial arts is still very important to me."

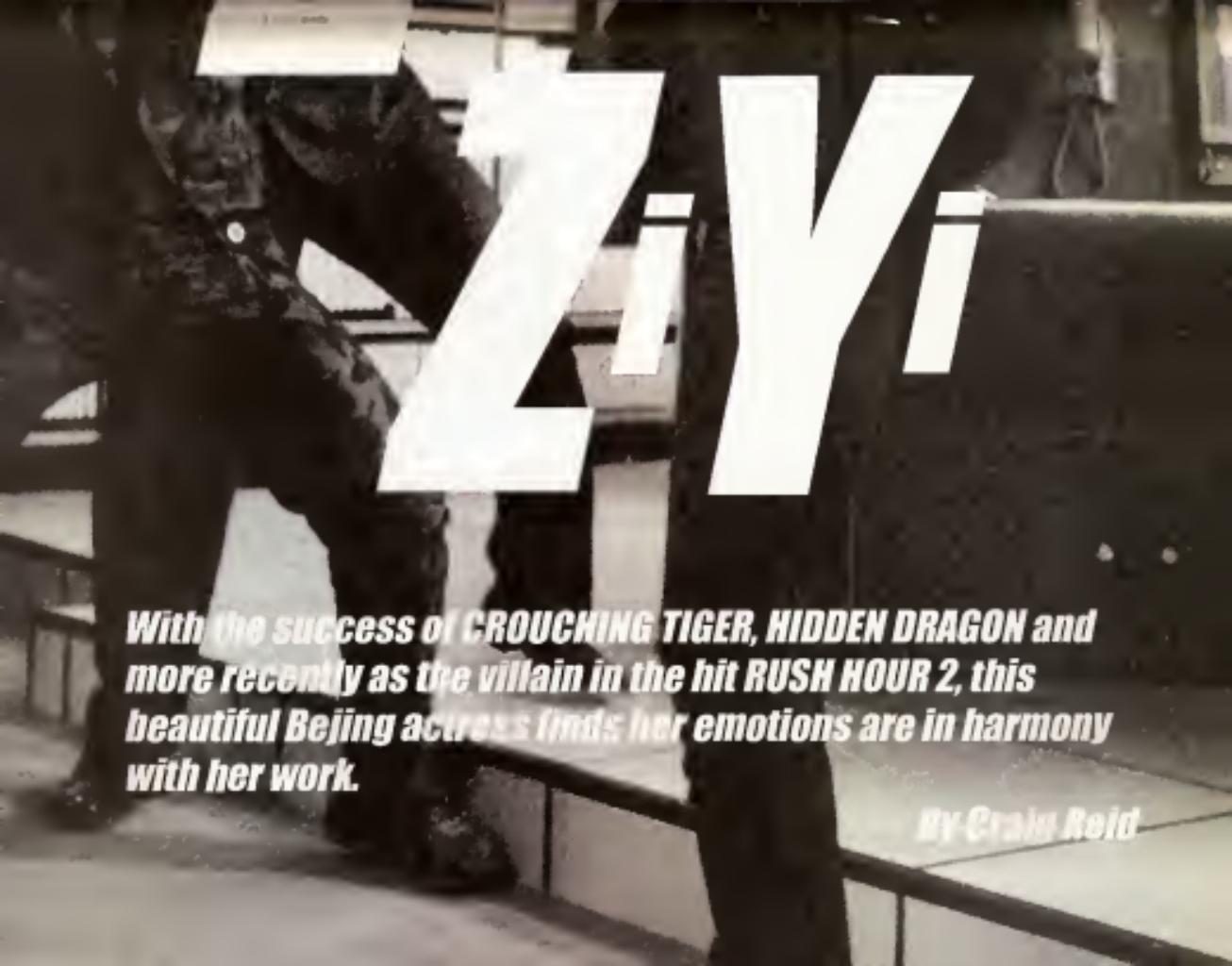
And how have they affected her life? She replies, "Tremendously. It's the best thing that has happened to me. It gives me a philosophy to be more positive, set goals, and go for it no matter what. I'd love to open up another school in the future. I'll be doing martial arts at 75, because if I don't do these things, I might not be so health conscious or be in shape. So with this shape, I can plan to have a better later life."

"I believe that all people, especially women and children, should learn some kind of self defense. I think I've been a role model for others, based on many people coming up to me and saying, 'Because we saw your film we started martial arts.' I feel like I've added something good to people's lives. And as an exercise, martial arts is a win-win situation, because you also learn self defense, and maybe one day you will have to use it to protect yourself or one of your loved ones." □





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*With the success of **CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON** and more recently as the villain in the hit **RUSH HOUR 2**, this beautiful Beijing actress finds her emotions are in harmony with her work.*

*By Craig Reid*



The world of cinema is a peculiar beast and, like an animal, its behavior is often-times unpredictable. On those occasions when the animal snaps or goes out of control beyond the realm of human understanding (just watch those Fox specials WHEN GOOD PETS GO BAD or WHEN ANIMALS ATTACK BACK), the results can be downright mind-blowing. And when one is in the middle of this madness and mayhem, one gets thrown into the spotlight, and with that spotlight comes the shadows of stardom and scrutiny. Chinese actress Zhang Ziyi is enjoying the brunt of one such attack with the bizarre and head-scratching success of her second film CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON, a film that bombed in Asia. And now good fortune has again fallen into her lap as, at the last minute, she was cast as the evil villain Hu Li in Jackie Chan's RUSH HOUR 2, the sequel to a film that was supposed to bomb, but once more the unpredictable animal attacked and RUSH HOUR exploded into success. Who is this young Asian actress? With all the established and beautiful talent in Hong Kong, how did she get the leads in RUSH HOUR 2 and CROUCHING TIGER and why isn't she embraced by her fellow countrymen as a star in China? I was fortunate to meet up with Zhang in L.A., where she was immediately caught off guard when I not only said her name right, but I could speak with her in Chinese. So let's hear her song, a song of destiny wrapped in fortune-cookie secrets advantageously embellished in Hong Kong tabloids. Things have not been easy.

"I'm sorry I don't speak English yet," she says de-murely. "I will soon be going to New York to learn English. Jackie [Chan] says that if I want to make it in American film that is what I must do. I am used to going away and studying."

Ziyi starred as "Leyla" along with Cheng Chen as "Lo" in the Oscar-winning martial arts masterpiece CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON.



"I left home when I was eleven to go to school and that was tough. During the winters I'd get up at five a.m. every morning to practice gymnastics then go to bed around eleven p.m. Even at a young age, I had to learn to push myself and depend on myself. But the surroundings in which I spent most of my childhood were different from most kids in China, because my school was very competitive as we'd vie for leadership, status, teacher affection. I really despised it and the whole aura around that sort of behavior against my personality. So when I was thirteen, I ran away from school and hid in a thicket of grass by the school and fell asleep. No one could find me and they called in the police. I woke up when I heard my mother's voice. I just wanted to escape that school but, of course, I knew I could not give up and leave, so I stuck it out."

"I won awards as a dancer but gave it up, the training was tough and I didn't think the sacrifices were worth the returns. Dancers don't get many job opportunities, but with acting, I found a career that gave me room to grow. The satisfaction I get from acting has nothing to do with the money or fame, but the feeling that my emotions are in harmony with my work." An asturied smile. "There's no way I'll change my profession."

Keeping to her word, Zhang has indeed gone on to bigger and better affairs of her harmony with her newfound passion. Born in Beijing in December of 1979, Zhang Ziyi (pronounced as "Jung") studied at the Beijing Dance Academy Middle School from 1990 to 1996. She is presently a second year student in the Acting Department of the Central Theatre College in Beijing. She was awarded the Chinese Folk Dance Tool Cup at the Fourth National Youth Dance Contest in 1994. But things really took off, and perhaps literally, after she was cast in the low-key story THE ROAD HOME, followed by the internationally successful CROUCHING TIGER, and now RUSH HOUR 2.

With a slight laugh, Zhang recalls, "Prior to meeting the director Brett [Ratner], I had heard that they were planning to do the film and that they were looking for a female actress and were casting all over Hong Kong. I never thought that I was under consideration or that a Hollywood film would come out here. While I was doing the film in Korea (WARRIORS also MOOSAN), my manager asked me to meet some people. As it turned out it was Brett and the producer who wanted to meet me. Within five minutes of the meeting Brett was talking entirely about the film, the characters, script, storyline in great detail. I interrupted asking, 'Why are you telling me all of this, do you want me to do a role or something?' I had no idea what this was about and thought it was just a meet-and-greet where Brett loved myself in CROUCHING TIGER and wanted to meet me. But he wanted to give me a part in the film."

The effervescent Ratner adds, "It really wasn't a female role intended for the assistant to the bad guy in the film; it was slated to be a man. But when I saw CROUCHING TIGER, I was blown away and really wanted to meet her. Even the producer said there was no part for her. So I flew to China to have dinner with her and as I was sitting there I said, 'I want you in this movie.' She's like, 'What part?' And I literally started picking up the part, replacing the scene of the guy I ended up firing, not because he wasn't a good actor, but because I saw her and [knew] she had to be the girl. So I just kept writing her in more and more. The chemistry between her and Chris [Tucker]—she doesn't speak a word of English and that was really great for them."



The film starts where RUSH HOUR left off, as the man with the fastest hands in the East, Chief Inspector Lee, and the man with the biggest mouth in the West, L.A.P.D. detective James Carter, are on their way to Hong Kong for a deserved vacation. Upon their arrival in Hong Kong, Carter immediately sets his sights on the city's many exotic delights: wine, women, and song. But Lee, the ever-dedicated and vigilant cop, continues with his duties which, of course, frustrates Carter. But no sooner do they arrive when they are confronted with the biggest case of their careers: a bomb has exploded in the American embassy, killing two U.S. Customs agents who had been investigating a money smuggling ring that is producing and shipping millions of "superbills," high-grade counterfeit U.S. \$100 bills.

Ratner further explains, "Basically it's the reverse of the first film. Chris is the fish out of water because now he's in Hong Kong. I came up with that idea when we were at the premiere of RUSH HOUR in Hong Kong, when he was walking down the street and everyone looked at him like he was crazy, and didn't understand a word he'd say. And when Chris went into the karaoke bar, which I must add is a very serious thing over there, he'd do his Michael Jackson routine and everyone would get insulted."

"In fact, when they first met, before the fist one, Jackie hadn't heard of Chris. I told Chris his verbal comedy and Jackie's physical comedy would be an awesome combination. At that time I was doing hip-hop videos, and kung fu is part of the hip-hop culture, and so I put the two things together. It wasn't



good, wow, finally, happy. This has taken me almost twenty years. I feel like before maybe I'm ready to give up and say no more U.S. market it totally destroy my confidence. But now everybody send me scripts, I don't know what happened, what's going on? So maybe I feel half and half because I still don't know how the future is going.

"But for *RUSH HOUR 2*, I involved a lot in creativity because everyone trusts me now. Before *RUSH HOUR* One, they still not sure if they think I know what I'm doing, but now I can do whatever I want! Chris can whatever dialogue he want, and me the action, when on one, not this way. But I now I trust American way, because *RUSH HOUR* is so successful, and now I feel I can follow the American way when I make American film, and when an Asian film, I do it the Asian way."

Zhang continues, "This film was a lot of fun for me because we had such a cute director and two great actors in Jackie and Chris. But working with Jackie was a very good experience. He's a great teacher and an exceptional professional filmmaker. He was also instrumental in teaching me martial arts, improve my acting, and how to take care of myself while still pushing me past my limits. And Chris is so funny. I've never done comedy before, and he is a real master of it. He's so aware of all the elements and his expressions and movements, even when he talks, although I don't understand him, I can feel the laughter in his voice. That was pure joy for me."

"In terms of the action, *RUSH HOUR* is more direct hand-to-hand combat kind of martial arts, whereas *CROUCHING TIGER* was more sword-and-sorcery martial arts, with a more fluid

until they met, where at the end of the meeting Chris says to me, 'I don't understand a word he said,' and Jackie said, 'I like him but what's he saying, I dunno, don't understand.' Then I knew it would work. In the film they didn't understand each other and it was funny. Chris always changes the script's words because it's written by a corny white guy, but Jackie is waiting for that last word of Chris's sentence for his cue and that word never comes cause Chris changes the order of words and uses his own words.

"As it turns out, Zhang becomes sort of Chris's love interest but not one for Jackie. Nobody wants to see Jackie hook up with a woman; his female fans have a hard time with that. The first time he had one in a film, several fans committed suicide."

Before I get back to Zhang, I grab a few quick words with Chris and then the man himself, Jackie. "I tell you, man," he says in his patented high-pitched voice. "One night we're filming all night, finished at five a.m., then went to the old-time market place. All I see is pigs hanging upside down by hooks in the trucks, then they're dragged across the road, and frogs, squirrels, and blood all over the sidewalk, pits of legs everywhere. The fish are alive in buckets and they just whack 'em there for you on the street, and chickens are live, and again, 'Whack.' They do it for you right in front of your eyes. I tell you, I couldn't eat a thing, except Jackie got me frog-split soup."

When I ask Jackie how he feels, now that he has finally made it in Hollywood, he sighs and introspectively says, "Well,

After winning four Academy awards last year, Ziyi cut the *CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON* celebration cake at an after-Oscar party. Interestingly, the film actually bombed in Asia!





artistic feel and more beautiful sense. My first day of shooting was a fight. Now usually on set there aren't many people, but on that day, there were. I was very surprised, and when I asked why so many, the director told me it's because it was my scene and I was fighting, and everyone was there to support and encourage me."

**Below:** Peter Pau (who took home the "Best Director of Photography" Oscar for CROUCHING TIGER) poses with Ziyi, Cheng Pei-peh, and Michelle Yeoh.

For those not familiar, CROUCHING TIGER is a lyrical tale of defiance, duplicity, righteousness, and destiny as told through the interwoven lives of two women who suffer the torment of undeclared love, and how the theft of a sword known as the "Green Destiny" brings everything to light. Set in the nineeenth century, the beautiful woman Yu Shu Lien (Yeoh) and legendary swordsman Li Mu Bai (Chow Yun-Fai) have forged a partnership of loyalty to the pursuit of justice over personal fulfillment. After the tragic death of her fiancee, Yu's devotion to his honor prevents her from sharing her secret passion for Li. Li believes that whoever owns the exquisite Green Destiny, a sword filled with ancient powers, will never find peace in one's life, so he entrusts the sword to Yu and asks her to deliver it as a gift to the highly-respected Shi Te in Beijing. When the sword is stolen, it sets off a four-way sequence of events between Yu, Li, the rambunctiously youthful aristocrat Jen (Zhang), and her wily, mysterious governess (Cheng Pei-peh).

"It was a very demanding shoot," she recalls. "Not just dramatically but also physically. We'd drive over ten hours every day just to reach some filming locations, but theights were the most difficult because, you see, I don't practice martial arts. Although I'm a trained dancer, it didn't prepare me for what Lee Ang had in store for me. In Chinese films,ights are done at a moment's notice and you have to do or learn a technique moments before shooting. And then I had all that wire-work stuff. I was pale, got nosebleeds, and often felt like crying. But what saved me was one day when I was



feeling really bad, I heard Chow Yun-Fat singing. He's my idol. He said I was unhappy and consoled me with those words. "It's much worse for me, I'm older, so don't feel so bad." After that, I began enjoying the freedom of flying high in the air. However, it was still strange being suspended in air like that, and tough swinging up and down, spinning around and around, and at the same time having to remember to act."

But luck was indeed on her side. Zhang was not Ang's first choice; in fact she wasn't even in the running. Taiwanese actress Shu Qi, the poufy-faced diva from Hong Kong's blockbuster hit *STORMRIDERS* and Jackie's *GORGEIOUS* was offered the role, but turned it down, claiming to be lazy, that it would be too difficult to do all that framing, and further rationalizing that she could never commit to a film that would have taken that long to film. Jet Li was also in fact offered the role eventually given to Chow Yun-Fat, where again, time was a factor for Jet, as his American film career was about to take off.

As it turned out, her relationship with a famed Chinese director Zhang Yimou (no familial relation) led to his recommendation of her to Ang Lee for the part. Ziyi's first film is *THE ROAD HOME*, the "official" start of her career. Unfortunately, it's also the beginning of the rumor mill that just keeps gathering steam. She actually got the role when she never showed up for a shampoo commercial audition in 1997 but was later invited back for a second chance. She got the gig, but it was never shot, so instead she was given the lead in *ROAD HOME*. Set in 1958, Ziyi plays the most beautiful girl in a village that is lovesick by a newly arrived school teacher. Before she appears on screen, the film is shot in black and white, then to emphasize her beauty and passion, it bursts into color with her entrance. It's actually not a bad film.

Yimou is probably most notably known in the West for directing *RAISE THE RED LANTERN*, a film which starred Hong Kong diva Gong Li. However, because Yimou discovered and made his first seven lectures with Gong Li and kept the actress as his extramarital mistress until 1994, Ziyi was nicknamed the "little" Gong Li, which was not an inference about her acting ability. Once she "broke it off," the tabloids inferred that Ang was now Yimou's replacement. And now that she is doing *RUSH HOUR 2*, the rumor mills are sadly taking on new dimensions.

Ziyi comments, "In my first film, *ROAD HOME*, I played a role similar to my true self, and so it was easier, but Jen in *CROUCHING TIGER* is very complex, lots of passion, emotion, something more difficult to associate with. I lost a lot of weight, cried a lot mostly from all the cuts and bruises, but the suffering was worth it and now I know I can act better and do martial art films, and, of course, I got to work with Chow. It's funny—years ago, I was at Beijing Film Studios and heard he was around, so I waited around, in the snow and freezing, and the soles of my boots had worn out, but I got to take a photo with him. And now I've worked with him."

"After *ROAD HOME*, I was called the little Gong Li, which bothered me, but I realize it's undoubtedly due to me doing my first film with Zhang Yimou. If I had done *CROUCHING TIGER* first, maybe it would never have occurred. Yet working with big stars like Chow, Michelle [Yeoh], and Ang Lee, was intimidating, and I felt pressure to do well and not disappoint Ang. I've sold this before, but I felt like I was a mouse and he was the lion."

It's curious that she mentioned hating dance school, and that part of that regret was directed towards all the students vying for teacher affection. The affection she searched for as a child is something that perhaps she still hasn't come to grips with. She elucidates, "During the filming of *CROUCHING TIGER*, Ang gave lots of encouragement and support to Michelle because she couldn't speak Mandarin. He constantly praised and encouraged her. Every time she did a scene really well, he'd jump up and give her a hug. I found myself hoping for the same thing. That moment came when Chow's character killed Jade Fox, a clash between the two people I loved the

"For some reason, the Chinese don't endorse or support their own movies and actors. *CROUCHING TIGER* was welcomed all over the world, but not in China... This is the thing that saddens me."







Zhang as "Yu," the beautiful daughter of a prominent general in Tang Dynasty China, who is about to face an arranged marriage.

most. After the scene, Ang said nothing, but walked over and hugged me. I got so emotional when he hugged me that I cried."

But there's a bitter irony about her growing fame: American audiences have quickly taken a liking to her, yet her own people, the Chinese audience, have downright rejected her. She comments, "For some reason, the Chinese don't endorse or support their own movies and actors. CROUCHING TIGER was so well-received all over the world, but not in China. Chinese people have an inferiority complex, and seem unwilling or unable to understand or acknowledge the work I've put into my career; they're also not willing to admit that, apart from luck, I've shed a lot of blood, sweat, and tears for my career which, oftentimes, I've paid dearly for the success. They refuse to understand and accept that and don't want to understand me. This is the thing that saddens me."

Notables in the Hong Kong film industry openly insult that, as an actress, she has little substance, and further chide that her rise is pure luck, and solely based on her relationship with director Yimou. However, there are a few things that each side fails to acknowledge. On one hand, this attitude can be attributed to U.S. pro athlete shacks, especially in baseball. Is Alex Rodriguez really worth \$156 million? We quickly have no pity for multi-million dollar athletes on strike who basically want more money. And why should we? Yet Chinese society, and, in fact, its whole mindset, is constantly engaged with the concepts of long life, happiness, good fortune, and good luck. Every Chinese street vendor claims that what he sells will bring you luck. People even flock to Buddhist temples for lottery numbers. So when someone does get lucky, they're depressed, because luck is only as good as what you can benefit from it. Your luck is my bad luck. It's common that when people become successful there are always many willing to cut you down for it.

Zhang postulates, "What can I ever say about this stuff that

will prevent them from being said. Only my achievements and actions can do that. Certainly, luck's involved in the beginning, but it's no longer luck as you work more. When people see you achieve, they know your work, and then they seek you out. I can say that my own abilities have given me luck."

And although she refuses to address the loaded words concerning her relationships, she does say, "Because our societies are developing, it's impossible for human relations to be as pure as those in the 1950's, a full giving of oneself to somebody. But when I decide to love someone, they'll have total possession of my mind, my heart, my actions; those will all be for him. A woman's love is like, When I love you, I'll throw all of myself into that love. Men are very different. When they are in love and maybe even married, they also will have girlfriends on the side. Men, right now, I have no time for falling in love, it's time for me to work hard."

What advice does Chan offer Zhang in her career? "I know her before CROUCHING TIGER, because I met Ang Lee and told him I'd like to make a drama film with him. She did the film and became famous so Brett won her in RUSH HOUR 2. I didn't think she'd like playing the bad girl, and don't have the guts to tell her she'd be bad. But then she accepted it. Then CROUCHING TIGER hit big, I said to her, 'Look, not many girls like you, two movies and boom, coming up big. But if you want to get into the American market, learn English and be careful on the film you do. One has to select the right script because the bad thing over there [Hong Kong] you do good, everyone will hire you; give you a lot of money and then you maybe do ten movies a day, then you hurt your career. Like CROUCHING TIGER right now, in Hong Kong I know twelve movies that is called CROUCHING this and SLEEPING that. Hong Kong movie is dying. Many in America see me come, Jet Li come, CROUCHING TIGER success, but it's not what you think. Hong Kong movie is dying, so she must be careful what she does next.' □



# Eugenio Yuan

Divine Daughter of a Living Legend

*by Craig Reid*

**H**ow many of you at some point in time have wished that maybe your mom or dad were a famous actress or actor? And maybe, on one hand, you thought that with that position, life would be easy: Money, fame, recognition, and influence. Surely these things must come with such a parent. But what about the other hand? Walking in the shadows, being referred to as "so-and-so's" child, or people wanting to know just so they can get to your parents or someone you know through your parents. It's a world most of us will never understand or want. But if you did, and you, too, wanted to become an actress, just like your mom, how strong would you have to be to try it on your own, find your own path, and ignore all the gibber-jabber and hokey chit-chat that undoubtedly would surface and plague every movement? Eugenia Yuan is one such person, who, if she really wanted to, could pick up, move to Hong Kong, and enjoy the gift of influence her mother could provide in a heartbeat.

Her mom is Hong Kong silver-screen legend Cheng Pei-pei. How famous is she in Asia? In the West, we have recently been introduced to her as the wily, villainess Jade Fox in CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON. She's the wise and mysterious governess to the youthful aristocrat Jen (Zhang Ziyi), whose only goal in life is to kill Chen Yun Fat's character Li Mu Bai. But in Asia, she is something like a female Bruce Lee wrapped up

in a Jackie Chan. Now that puts it into perspective.

Rather than tap into what would be the obvious and easy path for any child of such a big star, Eugenia has chosen the path less trodden, a path much more uncertain, but perhaps a path that leads to greater self-fulfillment. Recently, she took up the offer to star with her mother in what was supposed to be the sequel to CROUCHING TIGER, then relegated from PART 2 to FLYING DRAGON, LEAPING TIGER.

Demure face, full lips, and soft eyes, Yuan is often compared to Julie Roberts' "Beverly, bird, and raised in L.A." she easily smiles. "I've never lived in Hong Kong or China, but of course have been there regularly since I was young, and my family is there. I have two sisters and a brother, and went to UCLA." As it turns out, not only does she speak Cantonese and Mandarin, but also Russian and Bulgarian.

Throughout most of her pre-college years, she was ranked as one of the nation's top rhythmic gymnasts. Her splits go beyond 180 degrees. "I trained all through junior high school and high school, and after that I did professional shows and choreography for rhythmic gymnastics. And I spent two summers overseas training with the best in the world,

in Bulgaria and Russia.

"At that time, Russia was a dark and gloomy place to be. But they have the greatest rhythmic gymnastic training. I was always in the gym most of the day. The place I was staying at, my trainer's, she and her husband literally wake up in the morning to smoking cigarettes and drinking vodka for breakfast everyday. Not me. They'd make eggs or some sort of cracker thing."

"I went there to train with the best, to be in the Olympics, which didn't happen. They did my routines and their languages are very similar and I learned Russian in college. It's weird, because the girls over there are your friends but, then again, your competitors, and not really your friends. I grew up around these Russian girls and my coach. In fact, I saw her more than my mom."

Perhaps due to being apart from her mother for so long, acting seemed to be the obvious bridge to her past. Eugenia points out, "I felt like I wanted to act, but wasn't sure if I was doing it for the right reasons. Everyone in the family was always wondering if I would do it for the right reason, for me, and not because my mom did it, because I was young and unsure of my decisions. So I tried five years ago for a bit, but I wasn't confident in myself. But since two years ago, and I would say even more so today, I am much stronger, and have realized that I can perform and have the ability to express my emotions in this medium."

Sure, there was definitely an expectation that I'd act because of my mom, but she was almost like 'don't go into acting,' because she knows how difficult the industry is, especially in Hong Kong and Asia. It's nothing like L.A., where here, even a small co-star role, you get everything. We really have it made here." Author—Last year I did a film in Hong Kong. There were no sets, we filmed eighteen hours a day (two shoot-days were twenty-four hours straight), no writers, no chairs; there was drinking water, and lunch was noodles with chicken feet, pig ears, or ground pork. So how is China? I shudder to think. But it's rare to find out about FLYING

Right: Eugenia in 1985's THE CHI LING. Below: On location in beautiful Xing Jiang from the set of FLYING DRAGON, LEAPING TIGER.



"In the beginning I didn't know my mom was that big..."



Top: Eugenia and her superstar mom today, and (below) in 1972.

**DRAGON, LEAPING TIGER.**

"It does sound like it's a spoof, but actually it's not. It's a serious film. I really didn't think they were going to call it that. When we were there, we were trying to figure out the English translation. I don't know the Chinese title."

"My mom suggested I do this movie. I know the director, Alan Lea. We met on the set of *MARTIAL LAW*, but [I] met him in Hong Kong, and when he came to L.A., I got to know him. He always wanted to give me a chance. He did, however, warn me that it was going to be very *fu*." (The literal translation for "fu" is "bitter" or "sear." In this case, it's more of a symbolic word that reflects how bitterly tough doing something will be.)

She continues, "But it would be a big opportunity to do that big fight film, 35mm—working over there is totally different than over here; you really learn a lot there, especially with doing the stunts. As my [martial arts] trainer told me, watch the stunt men over there and watch their feet and how they move. But my mom also knew that I could handle the conditions. After training in Bulgaria, nothing has been too *bitter* for me."

**FLYING DRAGON, LEAPING TIGER** not only stars Eugenia and her mother, but also other Hong Kong film legends Sammo Hung and Jade Leung, most prominently known in the States for her

portrayal of Catherine in *BLACK CAT*, Hong Kong's superior rendition of Luc Besson's *LA FEMME NIKE*.

Yuan reminiscens, "It was filmed in Xing Jiang, it's absolutely gorgeous there, and it's in the Western part of China. It's very underdeveloped. It was also shot in exactly the same place as *CRUCHING TIGER*. In fact, the film was supposed to be a sequel of the film, a carry-on after *CRUCHING TIGER*, but because of the rights and things like that, and I'm not clear on the whole thing, but we couldn't call it the sequel. But it's still basically out of that series of stories."

That would be part of the multi-volume, several-thousand-page novel written by the Beijing-born Wang Du



La in the early 1930's. Where CROUCHING TIGER only told part of the story from the novel, this film tells a different part. And undoubtedly, other similarly themed and dubious rip-offs will find unused pages of the book and make legitimate films seem hazy. However, FLYING DRAGON seems to have a certain amount of authentic nobility, not only because of the star power and re-appearance of Cheng Pei-pei, but also because Miramax recently made the decision to distribute the movie in America.

Eugenio continues, "It's funny, because the same government people who helped CROUCHING TIGER also helped us and similarly appeared in both films. When I saw CROUCHING TIGER, [I

was] union when I was there. There are so-called five-star hotels, I don't know what kind of stars they have [laughs]. It was so gross, freezing cold, the electric heater was in the middle of the room we didn't sleep in. We landed in a place called 'Hu Du Ma Qu,' their capital city, then we had to drive in one of their so-called cars with little tires on bumpy roads; no roads like here, but these bumpy horrible things and these cars that don't know how to take the roads, but are forced to. Wow. It took twenty-some hours to get to the hotel, and that was for everyone, including the big stars—very uncomfortable. I really got to see how 'bitter' it was. The conditions are tough. We even had to push the car

like Shen Tzen where girls are just...you know...you have to be careful because taxis will kidnap you and stuff like that. So they could say, 'We're going to keep you here,' or take us to jail for any reason they wanted to think of, or you can pay them off. Even my mom was scared, and she is not scared of anything. They let us go, but then followed us, and stopped us again and said that we had to pay this fine for whatever reason it was. So we paid a huge fine and pushed on."

In a nutshell, FLYING DRAGON is set in the Ming dynasty and depicts the adventures of Cheng Chieh Luk Ching Yang (Shenmo) and his wife (Cheng Pei-pei). Eugenia lets out a bit more, "Well, they were also a couple before and had a child

as well as adopted a child. However, during a fire, one of the children dies. So later on, there's this boy and girl and they think perhaps they're brother and sister after they meet. But they're not, so now they're lovers, but the boy is my mom's son. It's one of those movies about the lost kid and they're found, and there's a love story and, oh yes, I think there is a sword involved. I play Hsiao Hsia, the sidekick and the protector to the girl (Jade Leung)." I point out the cool correlation that Hsiao is a similar role to her mom's character, Jade Fox, in CROUCHING TIGER, being a protector as well as protecting a person who in real life is named Jade.

"Yes, but I'm a younger version. My sister was killed by the people we are fighting so that's my added motive to fight back, but I'm very loyal to this princess. And whenever she fights, I fight with her. Then, of course, her guy has a sidekick as well and so we sort of side together. I'm armed and wield these two cool knives and do a bit of kicking, but my main thing is the knives. Probably a main difference from CROUCHING TIGER is that we had very limited wire work. As you know, doing wirework over there is scary; five guys pulling wires all over the place."

"But it was fun because it was my first time doing that much action and fighting with these stunt guys. Basically, the same ten stunt guys die over and over and they were also characters in the movie and play other random people. And for my horse stuff, I had to ride around and learn how to jump off and jump on



Eugenio and Chow Yun-fat.

thought.) Oh my God, I know him, he was in Xing Jiang helping us! The same person that taught Zhang Ziyi to ride a horse also taught me, and I had to learn in one day, not only how to ride, but also how to fight. And it wasn't just with the horse running around in a circle, where everything is soft and good, but it was up in the high mountains and, I must admit, I was scared and my legs were all bruised and down."

What's it like to film in China?

She raises her eyebrows, grins, and tells, "Let me put myself back in that sit-

through water; so we're all out there pushing the cars across water and these cars would just die and the drivers are driving them like crazy."

She stops short, then decides to continue. "Not sure if I should tell you or if it's a good thing to say...well, okay. The one thing that is really scary is we are in the middle of nowhere and these cops saw us. I mean, here's a car full of people and the cops are buried over there. And so we're on this mountain and they stopped us. And we are like, 'Uh-oh.' It was scary because I hear those stories about places

the horse and the other sidekick is coming up to me and then I have to jump on his horse by him pulling me up as we are riding up a hill. It was tricky but I did it, and I was proud of myself. All the stunt guys are really helpful. You learn to be friends with them and appreciate how tough it is. They're incredible and work like dogs and give their lives to director Alan. They've followed him for a long time and are so brave and just are young kids in their teens."

Looking through all her behind-the-scenes photos and the awesome panoramic shots of the shooting area, endless rolling hills, complete desolation, and totally lacking anything that resembles a road in or out of the unforgiving area, one also notices that the set is void of star trailers, parabolic hairsystems, Kraft (ined) service vehicles, or large trucks crammed full of sophisticated cameras or shooting equipment. It's just...empty.

"Although the stunts and fighting are physical...I even have to kick a guy off a horse..." the gleefully shrugs, "the biggest challenge was definitely the living conditions. It doesn't matter when you are shooting, it's just that after a long, two-hour drive to the set, you film literally all day then two hours back to the hotel in those horrible cars to that horrific hotel that is going to be cold, and you won't be able to take a shower. Sometimes we get done so late that we'd just stay out there on the set."

"Food? Over here, we just don't realize how lucky we are with Kraft services. We eat like kings in America, even if it's low budget. Over there, it's like an army of bag barrels of rice and whatever food they can get. It didn't matter, even for the stars, all the same thing. But what was good and very important was that the stuntmen would always eat first and sometimes we didn't have enough food for the rest of us. But there are two units and the stunt guys would work on both units and fight on both units and there were times where they wouldn't go home for two and three days at a time, and they'd shoot all day and night. But over all, I was so glad and happy to do the film, and I got to, with my mom."

Of course, like any new savvy and good-looking starlet starting out in Hollywood, she has run the gamut of things that are expected of such a looker. BEVERLY HILLS 90210, BAYWATCH, NYPD

BLUE, and even dabbled in stage, print ads, and reality shows like ARREST AND TRIAL. She also will accept the challenge of doing strong character roles in smaller independent films such as CHARLOTTE SOMETIME and the art film LIGHT PASSAGE JOURNEY BEFORE DEATH, directed by Trinhnhanh Ha. Certainly not the directions she would have taken if she had decided to live in Hong Kong, where getting work would have been a cinch. I bluntly ask Eugenia how does it feel to have a mom that essentially has the stature of say, a Bruce Lee in Asia and, although it must have been fun working with her mom on FLYING DRAGON, what kind of pressures did that really bring down upon her?

had better do good. And there were expectations Chinese people know how to say it and they don't hide it, saying things like, "Oh, well you are your mom's daughter so you should know how to do that." That can be hard because I get down on myself because I start to think that I should, but then you get upset with them because that's being disrespectful to my mother. But you know what? My mom doesn't have any of those feelings and wouldn't put pressure on me. She's very supportive, advises me, and tries to get me involved in other things, like when they were training for CROUCHING TIGER, she'd get me over there to train with them.

"But I'm a Californian, and I want to



She sits back thoughtfully, then points out, "About Bruce Lee. He is big everywhere, including the U.S. My mom is not known here except for after CROUCHING TIGER and the cult following of her Shaw Brother films, so I'd like to say that I'd think things are more difficult for Shannon (her daughter). (A tear in her eye...) not to have him around. I'd love to meet her."

"It was nice to work with her (Cheng Pei-pei) but it was a big challenge dealing with that and everyone knowing I was her daughter and you kind of feel like you

do things for myself. I've always had this feeling that I want to do everything myself because if I don't, I haven't achieved it. People will help people and it's who you know and connections, but I still have this feeling that I won't be successful unless I do it on my own. But you've got to adjust as the career goes further, because ultimately and realistically, there is no way anyone does anything totally by themselves. But perhaps for me, it's more about getting there without having to rely on her, or that she has arranged something for me, because I al-



“I don't want to do just martial arts. I like comedy and drama.”

so want to take pressure off of her. It's not my career she needs to be worried about, she has her own career and that can be tiring enough, without having to worry about me.

“Imagine your mother on a film set, and I'm fighting and riding horses that I've never done before. I can see she is so worried and that's hard. So, although it's nice to have a mother take care of you while on set, you need to do it for yourself and not let anyone worry. The director and everyone else shouldn't have to worry about how they act in front of me, or worry I'm her daughter, or treat me better because my mom is there. But what I have learned from her is that she's not one of those diva ladies. It's all about being equal and she's very generous and kind and I've learned that from her.”

“In the beginning, I didn't know my mom was that big because, at that time, she wasn't acting for a while. She was teaching Chinese dance in America and I had been doing dance with her since I was four. But even back then, being her daughter, I felt like I had to be the best in her class. Maybe she didn't say that, but I felt like I had to. And so I've already grown up with that in mind and now that I'm into acting, there is this assumption that I was born knowing how to kick, do martial arts and stuff. I can do martial arts and I think now, especially with martial arts being the big kick, it's the thing that is actually getting Asian actors more work. It's also like, if you're an Asian actor, you had better know how to do it. And that's been hard for me to accept and agree to say that it's a good thing, because I don't want to do just martial arts. I like comedy and drama, but I do understand that it is an opportunity to do a martial arts film if you have the skill, but, I must admit, it's a great genre. You know, I'm proud of my mother and her films, she is really awesome.”

“There really is a difference when you train to understand a martial art and train just to fight in film,” Eugenia explains. “When you understand the martial art, you feel more centered, a grounded feeling, the control that comes from the art; and I also like the contact with



A new cast photo from the new movie that stars Eugenia and her mom, FLYING DRAGON, LEAPING TIGER.

that. My trainer teaches me wing chun, some weapons, escrima and kali (Filipino stick fighting), Western fencing, kendo, so when I do weapon work I can translate Western styles with combinations of other styles which hopefully make me unique. And he helps me a lot to develop good karate-style looks. The foundation he teaches me is wing chun, although I've had some previous experience doing wu shu, which is more gymnastics, like what you see in CROUCHING TIGER."

Literally meaning "war arts," wu shu describes the performance art developed by the Communist authorities that combined elements of Beijing opera, gymnastics, and traditional Chinese kung fu.

"But what's really intriguing about wing chun," she elaborates, "it's an art created by a female, which is what got me interested in it. Through studying as a martial art, I've developed a much stronger sense of self, a much more peaceful and happier feeling in life since I've been learning. I'm realizing, after the fact, that I've been able to translate, without even knowing it... those things into other aspects of my life, every situation in life, every difficulty, including auditions, breathing, fighting, and finding that spirit. Auditions are my biggest challenge and training in martial arts has made me feel more confident and more calm."

And what about the angst that surrounds you when your mom receives so

much attention, praise from fans, autograph seekers, and people always impinging on your mother's time? Setting back, she introspectively admits, "Well, what really bothers me is that I'm jealous. Ever since I was little and saw that happen, I was jealous that my mom was not just mine; not jealous of her, but of everyone else who could have easy contact with her. But as I'm getting older, I'm realizing what she has accomplished and I'm proud of her, especially over the last couple of years. My mom has overcome many things. She's a very strong woman, and I'm more proud of her for these things than any of the achievements in this business. But also, as you get older, you realize that there are more things that they don't know about her. And also being in this business I see how I am with everybody, but when I'm with my friends and family, I'm theirs and not what I am for everyone else. I'm still my own self and for my own family."

With all the dilemmas in life that could come from having a celebrity parent, one thing Eugenia is certain of is that there is no identity crisis in her life. It's not about being Chinese, American, or American-Chinese, it's about being proud of who she is, and it doesn't matter to her what you label her.

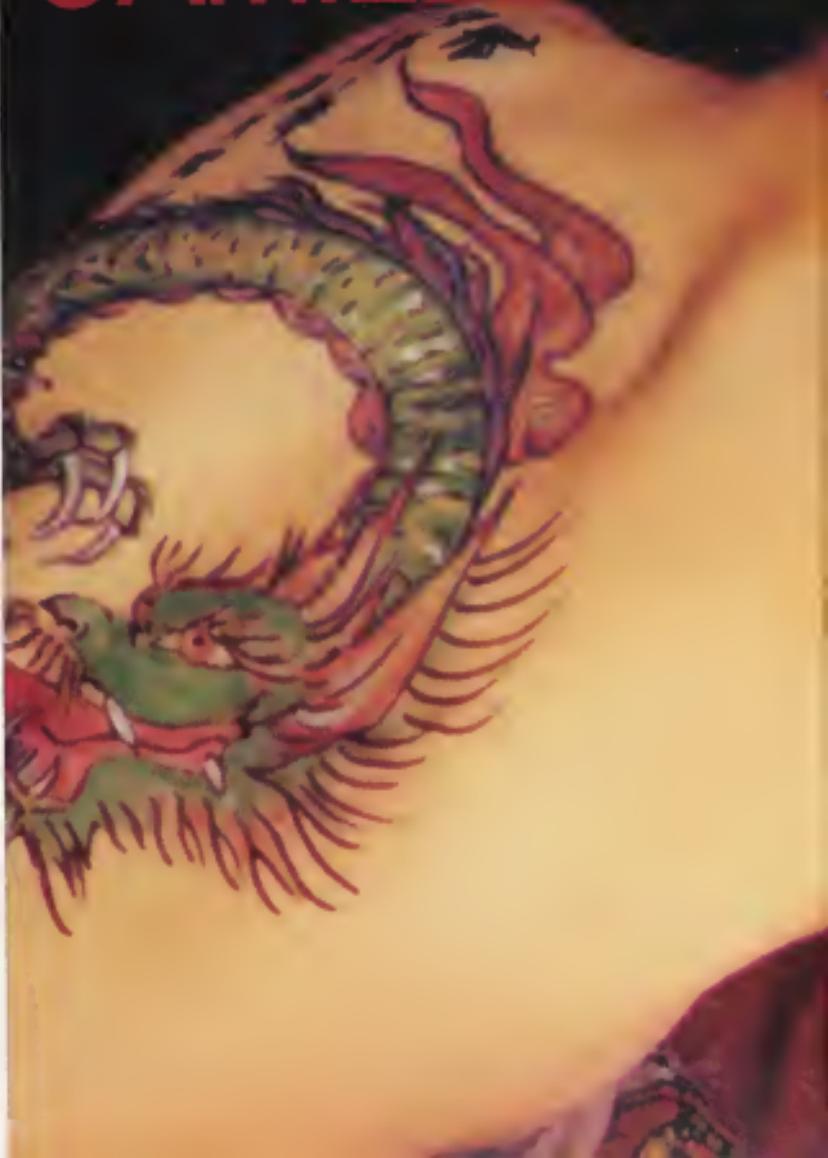
She comments, "I'm proud that I can speak fluent Chinese, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Shanghainese. I'm proud I can go over there and speak to anyone that is important to me, so I can work

over there and speak the language and sound right. On the other hand, I don't have an accent when I speak English. So funny enough, it's hard on me in America when I'm asked to speak English with an accent. That is bothersome and stereotypical for doing films here. I mean, when I'm over there, I don't have to speak Chinese with an English accent."

When I interject that she's been known to avoid the press in Hong Kong, she notes, "It's not that I avoid it, but I'd like to make an effort to avoid it. I understand that publicity for this career is necessary. I think I have a hard time with publicity because I'm my mom's daughter. It should be her light, not mine, and I don't want to take any of that away or ruin it. I don't want that to sound negative, but what I'm saying is that I'm never sure if what I'm saying is going to affect her. So if I say something wrong or not right and it's for my mom, then I'll not feel good about myself, so I need to be careful what I say. But again, it's about being accepted for what I do. Even what I'm saying here, it will probably eventually get back to her. But the bottom line is, I just want to act, and maybe direct in the future, because everything is like a dance to me in life. I love choreography and when I hear music, I think of how I'd put a scene together, because that is also like dance choreography, and I'd like to see how I could translate that into film." □

**CANDACE**

**CAMILLE**





## From TV to Movies to Music Videos, this Mainstream Maiden is Living the Good Life.

By Michael Beeler

On a little piece of two-lane blacktop known among Victorville, California locals as "Rattlesnake Road," Candace Camille is tearing up the asphalt. She's just completed a calendar photo shoot for gr8ride.com, a website that hosts fast cars and beautiful women.

The sun is setting over the still-sweltering desert as she jams down the roadway full throttle, tunes blaring and her hair dancing wildly in the rushing wind. Camille is a runner. She's a fully stoked, totally ignited girl machine racing toward the horizon. She has places to go and people to see and the road, stretched out before her, is wide open.

Camille's days, for the most part, are a constant blur as she races to and from studio sound stages, location photo shoots, lunch meetings, dialogue rehearsals, and her grandparents' home. She is, in fact, a busy woman.



When we first featured her in *Femme Fatales* five years ago, when her name was Candace Camille Bentler, she was a regular cast member for the Saturday-lads' television series *MASKED RIDER*. But even then, during the off-hours, she was involved with feature films, posing for pin-up calendar, and appearing in alternative rock videos on MTV.

Presently, Camille's career is literally all over the map with print work, commercials, dot.coms, television, cable shows, and movie reviews. She has already booked four pilots this year and is actively developing her own web site. So it seemed like a good time to try and pin her down again and see if we could get an update for our readers.

*MASKED RIDER* was canceled a few years ago after the hazing of its fourth episode. And although Camille was saddened by the loss of her television family and what she refers to as a great job, she seemed to bounce back rather easily.

"I immediately went to New York for a month to visit my best friend," said Camille, who played Barbara Stewart, a middle-aged mother of three, on the show. "While there, I had freedom of time, which I seldom had during the production of the television show. I went to restaurants, museums, and didn't really think about acting. Not thinking about work helped me accept that the show was over and that I was going to have to do something else."

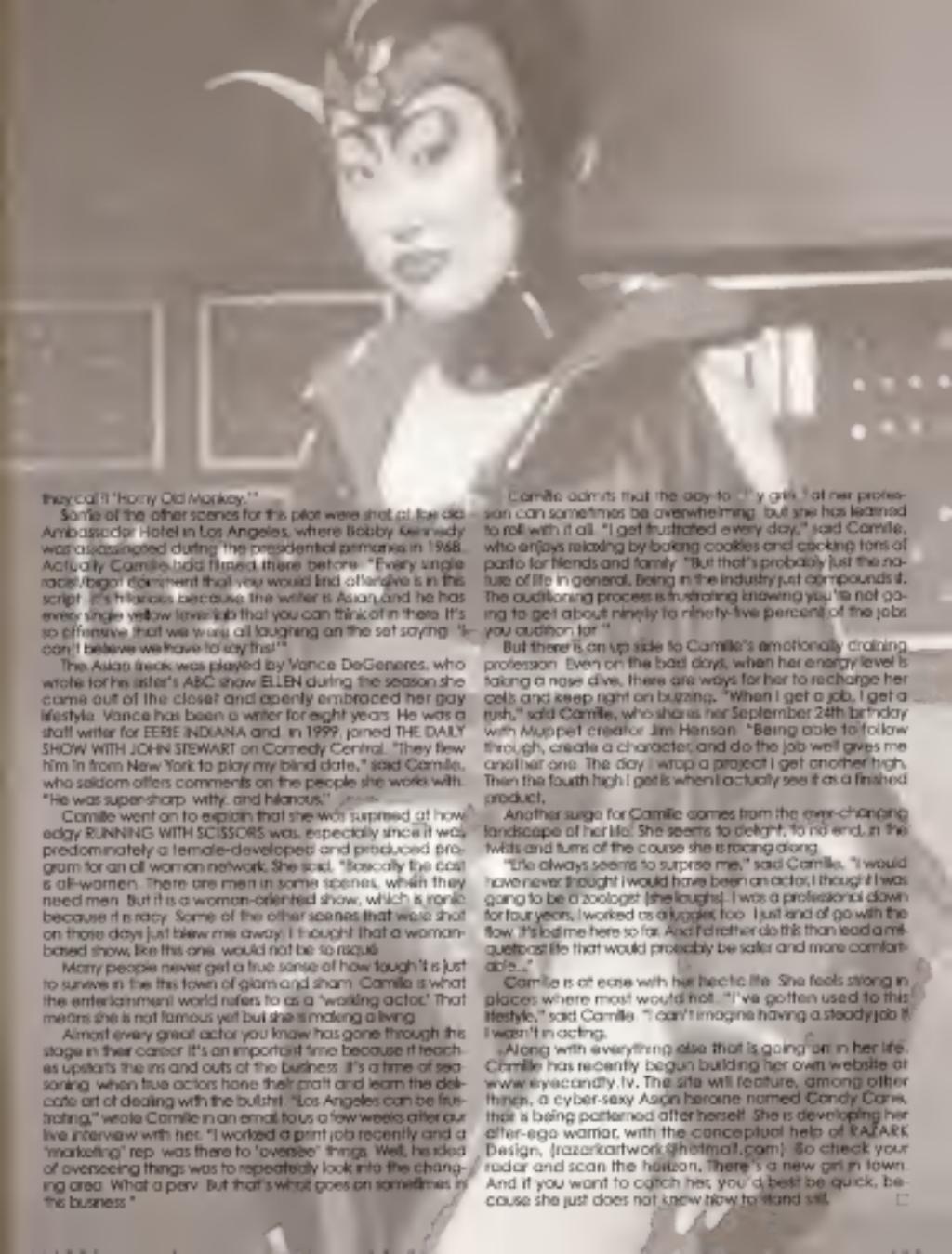
New York was very therapeutic for Camille. She was able to relax, rethink her career, and catch her wind before getting back into the fray of the entertainment industry. "I got my head together there in New York," said Camille. "Then I came back to Los Angeles and just hit it. I got into an acting class, hired a personal coach, and started to audition like crazy. At first I worked commercially."

"The first commercial that I did was a cheerleader for FX. I was on a huge trampoline as a cheerleader swinging pom-poms. And I thought, 'Okay, this is something I've never done before [she laughs]!' Then I got the Clear Essence Cosmetic's campaign and I was in a WAYANS BROTHERS episode called 'It Takes A Thief.' I played a woman that gets fired by her boyfriend. And I was working steady from that point on."

While moving from audition to audition, Camille came across a group that was casting a pilot for a new all-woman cable station. She ended up doing several readings over the course of two days before being signed up for the show. "One of the pilots I did is called *RUNNING WITH SCISSORS*," said Camille, while enjoying a late lunch at the Ventura Harbor in Southern California. "It's a sketch comedy show on the Oxygen Network."

During her two-year stint on *MASKED RIDER*, Camille had the opportunity to work with insects, rodents and reptiles. One of the episodes, which you can sometimes catch now that the show is in syndication, called for covering her with giant, slow-moving, Madagascar Hissing Cockroaches. She refers to that scene as "fun." She also says she loved playing with the rats. Unfortunately, when she was asked to work with non-human actors in *RUNNING WITH SCISSORS*, she did not find the experience quite as joyous.

"One episode was called 'Hairy Old Monkey,'" said a visibly embarrassed Camille. "I actually worked with two monkeys and a baboon, a real baboon, which weighs about 35 pounds. They're very scary animals in real life. I was surprised. Anyway, the storyline is about me and another woman in a zoo, and we come across a really cute monkey. So we're feeding him peanuts. Meanwhile, the monkey grabs the woman's hair and pulls her head against the bars and starts doing quite crude things with her head. The monkey does some illicit things with her hair. He [she almost whisper] humps her head. And that's why



they call it "Horny Old Monkey."

Some of the other scenes for this pilot were shot at the old Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, where Bobby Kennedy was assassinated during the presidential primaries in 1968. Actually Camille had heard about before. "Every single racist/bigot comment that you would find offensive is in the script—it's hilarious because the writer is Asian and he has every single yellow lever/obstacle that you can think of in there. It's so offensive that we were all laughing on the set saying, 'I can't believe we have to say this!'"

The Asian break was played by Vance DeGeneres, who wrote for his sister's ABC show *ELLEN* during the season she came out of the closet and openly embraced her gay lifestyle. Vance has been a writer for eight years. He was a staff writer for *EERIE INDIANA* and, in 1999, joined the *DAILY SHOW WITH JOHN STEWART* on Comedy Central. "They flew him in from New York to play my blind date," said Camille, who seldom offers comments on the people she works with. "He was super-sharp witty, and hilarious."

Camille went on to explain that she was surprised at how edgy *RUNNING WITH SCISSORS* was, especially since it was predominately a female-developed and produced program for an all-woman network. She said, "Basically the cast is all-women. There are men in some scenes, when they need men. But it is a woman-oriented show, which is ironic because it is racy. Some of the other scenes that were shot on those days just blew me away. I thought that a woman-based show, like this one, would not be so risqué."

Many people never get a true sense of how tough it is just to survive in the fabled town of glam and sham. Camille is what the entertainment world refers to as a "working actress." That means she is not famous yet but she's making a living.

Almost every great actor you know has gone through this stage in their career; it's an important time because it teaches upstarts the ins and outs of the business. It's a time of seasoning, when true actors hone their craft and learn the delicate art of dealing with the bullshit. "Los Angeles can be frustrating," wrote Camille in an email to us a few weeks after our live interview with her. "I worked a print job recently and a 'marketing' rep was there to 'oversee' things. Well, instead of overseeing things was to repeatedly look into the changing area. What a perv. But that's what goes on sometimes in the business."

Camille admits that the day-to-day grind of her profession can sometimes be overwhelming, but she has learned to roll with it all. "I get frustrated every day," said Camille, who enjoys relaxing by baking cookies and cooking tons of pasta for friends and family. "But that's probably just the nature of life in general. Being in the industry just compounds it. The auditioning process is frustrating knowing you're not going to get about ninety to ninety-five percent of the jobs you audition for."

But there is an up side to Camille's emotionally draining profession. Even on the bad days, when her energy level is taking a nose dive, there are ways for her to recharge her cells and keep right on buzzing. "When I get a job, I get a rush," said Camille, who shares her September 24th birthday with Muppet creator Jim Henson. "Being able to follow through, create a character, and do the job well gives me another one. The day I wrap a project I get another high. Then the fourth high I get is when I actually see it as a finished product."

Another surge for Camille comes from the ever-changing landscape of her life. She seems to delight to no end in the twists and turns of the course she is racing along.

"She always seems to surprise me," said Camille, "I would have never thought I would have been an actor; I thought I was going to be a zoologist [she laughs]. I was a professional clown for four years. I worked as a juggler, too. I just kind of go with the flow. This led me here so far. And I'd rather do this than lead a quiet, quiet life that would probably be safer and more comfortable..."

Camille is at ease with her hectic life. She feels strong in places where most would not. "I've gotten used to this lifestyle," said Camille. "I can't imagine having a steady job if I wasn't in acting."

"Along with everything else that is going on in her life, Camille has recently begun building her own website at [www.eyeandy.com](http://www.eyeandy.com). The site will feature, among other things, a cyber-sexy Asian heroine named Candy Cane, that's being patterned after herself. She is developing her alter-ego woman, with the conceptual help of RAFAK Design, ([razerkarkwork@hotmail.com](mailto:razerkarkwork@hotmail.com)). So check your radar and scan the horizon. There's a new girl in town. And if you want to catch her, you'd best be quick, because she just does not know how to stand still."

THE LEGACY CONTINUES

# SHANNON LEE



# LEE

Being the daughter of martial arts legend Bruce Lee, Shannon Lee finds herself being offered roles in tasteless scripts having to do with her father. In one, she was to play a detective guided by the spirit of Bruce Lee. In another, she was to enter a time portal to try to prevent her father's death. Having no interest in exploiting her father or herself, Shannon Lee wrote her own screenplay, designed to showcase her talents in a film. *SERAPHIM* will tell the story of a superheroine named Seraphim, to be played by Lee.

"It's an action film, yet it's like a comic book in a way," Lee said. "It's going to have quite a lot of special effects. It's about a young streetwise girl who is down on her luck and who suddenly finds herself wrapped up in the middle of this battle between good and evil and having to figure out her destiny. Because of its supernatural comic book nature, the story lends itself to a lot of the type of action being done right now in terms of the wire work and things like that. It'll have that Hong Kong brand of action to it. It will entail the martial arts, but it won't be a martial arts film per se. I'm hoping to give it a really fast pace and dynamic look."

Lee has trained in the martial art of Jeet Kune Do for the past eight years. In her earlier years, she was more interested in

BY FRED TOPEL





Shannon's first "Hollywood" experience came when she was her brother Brandon's assistant on his movie RAPID FIRE (below).

singing than fighting. She has a degree in music from Tulane University, where she also met her now-husband, Ian Kessler. Her interest in performing eventually developed into acting with her first exposure to Hollywood when she served as brother Brandon Lee's assistant on *RAPID FIRE*.

"He said, 'It's a tough business, babe, but if you really love it and you really want to try, then you should.' So, I went back to New Orleans to be with Ian and I performed in musicals with local theaters and worked a 9-to-5 job for State Farm Insurance. But then I said, 'Okay, we've been out here doing what you want to do for a couple years. It's time to go do what I want to do.' So, we moved to Los Angeles and that's when I started pursuing acting."

Her first appearance on film was playing a singer in a cutaway shot in *DRAGON: THE BRUCE LEE STORY*. Lee considers her first real acting job to be the low-budget indie actioner *CAGE II*.

"I happened to be over at Muscle and Fitness, Joe Weider's offices, doing an interview with a freelance writer for—I believe it was *Kung Fu*, one of the martial arts magazines. I met Lou Ferrigno there and he said, 'We're looking for somebody to be in this movie, would you be interested?' It was dumb luck, in the right place at the right time. I said, 'Sure.' That was one of the first jobs I had with stunts and everything."

Since then, she's shared screen time with Wesley Snipes in *BLADE* and Sammo Hung on the TV series *MARTIAL LAW*. Her other major action lead role was in the Hong Kong film *ENTER THE EAGLES*, where she learned about wire work.

"It's very interesting. It's fun but it's also tedious and painful because you have this really tight harness on and

you're being hoisted around. It takes a little getting used to because you have to get the balance point just right of where the wire attaches to your harness so that you don't tip too far forward or too far back, so you get the sense of being able to balance yourself in the air."

Lee plans to add a wire work influence to *SERAPHIM*, based on the character's supernatural abilities. It was important for her to create a logical plot device for anti-gravity action.

"I'm not sure how much of this story to give away at this point, but let's just say she is imbued with a certain amount of powers, which she needs to learn how to understand and control and use to her benefit. I have a hard time



watching films where all of a sudden people are flying through the air, locking each other five times before they land on the ground, because that's not possible. For me, it's a much easier pill to swallow if it's part of the convention of the story, like *THE MATRIX* or *CHUNG TIGER* (*HIDDEN DRAGON*), which had a much more mythic, legendary quality to it. It works better if it's a part of the story. *CHARLIE'S ANGELS* was different because that move just seemed to be about having fun. It was about the cheesecake and was unbelievable from the word 'go.' There was a balance to be had between letting yourself go with it when you're in a story and set, and having your B.S. meter go off."

Lee was finalizing independent financing for the film at the time of our interview, though she intends to shop the completed film around Hollywood for studio distribution. The whole process of putting a production together has been a learning experience for her:

"I had never written a script before so I decided, why not give it a try? It took quite a long time in terms of the process from just getting it to the very seed of an idea into fleshing it out into a full-fledged script. It was my attempt at an action film that also has an interesting story and is character-driven. Also, I wanted to do something for myself. Aside from writing it, I also saw myself in this role and wanted the chance to do something spectacular and do something on film. Being that I am who I am, I figured the best way to let people let me do this was to do an action vehicle. Being Bruce Lee's daughter definitely opens some doors, especially of the people who are curious. It still requires me to be able to convince people to let me do a part. More people are willing to give me a part in an action film because I'm Bruce Lee's daughter as opposed to in any other kind of film."

The loss of her father and brother still affects Lee on a daily basis, though mostly in healthy ways that help her keep their memory alive. "In my father's case, I was too young to really deal with it. I've grown to incorporate into my life the fact that he is not here. How I feel about that changes day to day, time to time, depending on the situation. As far as my brother is concerned, that also is something that I have good days and bad days about. I try to remember that both my father and my brother were people who loved life and lived it to the fullest. I try to emulate them in that respect, because I think that's what they would want. Also, I truly believe they are still with me, so I haven't lost them forever. They're still with me."

Part of Lee's interest in taking up Jeet Kune Do was her renewed interest as an adult to get in touch with her father's tradition. It was not to have a vehicle for action films.

"I train for myself now. As a child I had a brief stint around the age of ten or eleven, where I studied with Richard Bestillo who was one of my father's students. But, as a kid, I was more interested in being on the soccer team with my friends and the softball team and



the volleyball team. Not necessarily staying away from martial arts consciously, but just wanting to be doing what everybody else was doing. Ultimately, I wanted to find out more about my family and learn more about my body and mind through the execution of martial arts, so I came full circle. Another thing that had a lot to do with my renewed interest was that around that time I had moved back to Los Angeles [in 1992]. I got back in touch with people I knew trained and just started fooling around with training. I also became active in the Bruce Lee Educational Foundation. It's a group made up of myself and my mom and several of my dad's original students. It's a non-profit organization that we put together as a place for people to go to get authentic information about my father and about his martial art, Jeet Kune Do."

Being a trained martial artist does not necessarily make it easier to be a martial arts movie star. Lee found that after learning how to fight practically, she had to make modifications to her technique for film cameras to capture her movements.

"When you do it for real, the movements are much more concise, you don't exaggerate your moves, you don't telegraph your moves, whereas in film you need to sort of let that go a little bit in order for it to look dynamic for cameras. A lot of times you need to have these wide swings and a lot more fluid sort of halts movement, which if you've been doing it a different way for years and years, can sometimes be a little difficult to let go of. It takes a certain amount of innate athleticism and coordination, sort of the inner knowledge of the workings of your body, to be good at it on screen."

"A lot of times people say, 'She's Bruce Lee's daughter. We'll assume that she can do action, but can she act?' Any time that I





Shannon practices a fight scene with Hong Kong's Richard Hung on the set of TV's *MARTIAL LAW*. Despite decent ratings, the series was cancelled last year. Lee's interests go beyond just action roles, including parts in a few independent films, and pursuing her love of singing.

get the chance to be able to show somebody I can act, I'm happy to do it. But the reason I got into acting was because I enjoy acting and that's first and foremost what I'd like to do."

When looking for non-action roles, Shannon has found the Lee family name to be somewhat of a hindrance, as many casting directors looking for Asian women are disappointed in her ethnic-neutral looks.

"I don't get many Asian roles because I'm [only] half Chinese and I don't particularly look Asian. Actually there are a lot of times I'm sent out for Asian roles that are very Asian and take place in China or historical China or involve Asian immigrants or something. I go on the audition and people say, 'Well, good job but you don't look very Chinese'."

In the last year, Lee has found some roles in two independent films that have allowed her to explore acting without martial arts. "I was in Europe working on a film called *SHE, ME AND HER*. It's a film about two twins who are struggling actresses in Hollywood and one's the good, talented twin and one is the bad, untalented twin and the bad twin is always trying to one-up the other one. At one point, the one twin rents her apartment out from under her while she's out of town and she regales it to my character, Paula. So I have a few mistaken identity scenes with the different twins and trying to figure out who's who and I'm a struggling actress myself, so there are a lot of little kind of funny, quirky scenes. It was a small part but it was a fun role and it was straight acting, so I was happy to do it. Then I also just worked on a small independent film called *NEVER GET OUT OF THE BOAT*. It's a very serious film about drug and alcohol abuse and recovery. I had a small part. I played a drunk girl. My character didn't have a name. It was really fun to get to create something a little bit different."

Lee is still actively pursuing her musical interests as well. "I am still singing. I have been working on some

demos in the past and took a little bit of time off to finish up some of the writing I had been doing and I'm getting back to that now."

Even before she went to school for music, Lee recalls leaning towards the aural arts as a young child. "I've always loved singing. I was one of those kids who sang around the house and made up songs. When I was in seventh grade, they were having auditions for a musical at school and my mom said, 'You have to audition. You have a beautiful voice. You have to audition.' Sort of a typical mother thing. So, I decided that I would do it, I would audition and when it came down to the time for the auditions, I was actually too shy. So I went in afterwards on my own to the music director and said, 'My mom really wants me to audition for this part.' So, she said 'Well, sing something for me.' And I sang and I got a part and moved on from there. And then it seemed like acting, as far as film and television was concerned, was just another arena for performance that I hadn't tried and I was interested in doing."

Though her training is in classical music and operas, Lee describes her current song projects as "more contemporary music, rock with elements of different things in it. I'm still finding myself in terms defining my style but it's probably a blend of alternative with some elements of alternative rock with some elements of hip hop. I play the piano and I just got a guitar so I'm learning how to play it. I'm struggling along with it. I play the piano so in terms of what you can do nowadays with keyboards and synthesizers, you can pretty much demo any instrument that you want."

When she's not writing, singing, or acting, Lee lives a non-Hollywood life in the community of Pacific Palisades, California. "When I'm in the Palisades, I am a homebody. I shop at the grocery store and I go to the dry cleaners and I get my pictures developed and I walk my dog and do all that kind of stuff. I don't really do too much business-wise."

[FATHER BRUCE AND  
BROTHER BRANDON] "I  
HAVEN'T LOST THEM  
FOREVER. I TRULY BELIEVE  
THEY ARE STILL WITH ME."





# JEA CODE CHI

With her hands bound behind her, Hong Kong Special Forces agent Lucy Chang is in a tight spot. She is about to be executed by a henchman of the evil Dr. Fong the killer puts a gun to the back of her head and begins to squeeze the trigger. It looks like curtains for Chang, played by the lovely American actress Jeanne Chang, in the UPN film *CODE NAME: PHOENIX*.

Set later in the new century, the film boasts such futuristic scenes as a \$46 hot dog, videophones, sonic grenades, and the assassination of a Britney Spears Comeback Tour. The U.S. Marshals office has been privatized. Agents now track down fugitives for the bounty on their heads. Law enforcement uses kinder, gentler methods against the criminal scum they're up against. Sleep bullets and sleep wards render the crooks unconscious and they are removed to sleep in holding pens, awakened only to talk with their attorneys until their trials. Chang (code name: "Phoenix") is a member of a 21st century Special Forces Squad that attacks the secret laboratory run by Dr. Fong (Dennis Alcapone), a genetics specialist who is about to release a self-replicating virus, which is a modern-day fountain of youth with a catch. Betrayed from within their own ranks, the special forces operation fails, Fong escapes, and Lucy is presumed dead when the research facility explodes. Lucy surfaces in California and immediately becomes a fugitive with a million-dollar reward on her pretty head, due to a Fong directive. Fortunately, she convinces marshal Jake Hawkins, played by Jeffrey Meek, to help her expose the plot.

"I had been substituting like crazy the week I went up for the role," said Chang. "When they called me and told me I had the part, I couldn't remember which one it was." During the on-camera interview, director Jeff Freilich asked Chang if she knew any martial arts. Having trained in Jeet Kune Do for several years, Chang proceeded to show just what she could do. "I've been training with these great teachers of mine," she said. "Jeet Kune Do is the martial art that Bruce Lee kind of invented. He studied a lot of different arts and took what he thought was the best from each."

His idea was to do what was fastest. To do what was practical. Use your front hand instead of your rear hand. It was more classical than showy, without so many unnecessary

BY DAN SCAPPEROTTI

# NN NAME: PHOENIX NN

essary bountishes. If you're in a real fight, are you going to put your arms out and wave them all around? No, you're just going to hit. A lot of the other arts are very beautiful to look at, but maybe not as practical in hand-to-hand combat. I never thought I would be interested in martial arts. I thought it was a stereotype. But I sort of fell into it by accident and found that I really enjoyed it. It's very empowering. It's great for your physical body and also for the philosophy... I love it. Martial arts [is] like a sport. It's as if you were playing basketball. It's fun. It's interactive. And you can always improve."

**T**he actress' fighting ability came in handy when Lucy had a gun to her head. Patiently, she waited for the pistol's click, ducked, letting another handgun take the bullet, disarmed another of his knives, and let it fly into the arm of a third killer. "They had me in this little sandness and high heels, and we're working on gravel and freezing," said Chan, remembering the scene. "It was at the end of the shoot and it was getting cold, in October I fought all day long. It was something else, just to do that sequence over and over. Besides that, I'm locked in a trunk. Every forty minutes they'd throw me back in the trunk and shut the lid. It was a really hard day for me. But I got out my aggression that I had. I had that stoned pipe at the beginning. This pipe is actually foam, and they said 'You know, you're going to hit these bountishes.' At first, I was telling them 'I'm not going to hit you very hard, because I don't want to hurt you.' They say 'No, no. Just do it for real.' By the end of the day, I was just whacking them and whooping them with the stick. It's not really that soft, because it has a stiff core. They had a lot of twists the next day."

What attracted Chan to the role was the chance to play a strong female lead. "I liked it because she was someone who didn't necessarily need to depend on somebody else to fight for what she believed in," said Chan. "She just goes for it. She fights against her own fear and tries to remember what her mother told her. I really admire people who, against all odds or whatever phobias or concerns they might have, just push through." When it is suggested that Lucy Chang is a female Jackie Chan, Chan replies "The only thing that's different, I guess, is that he has his own little sticks with a comedic spin on the martial arts, which they didn't incorporate in this film."

Jeff Frentz not only directed *CODE NAME: PHOENIX* but wrote and produced the film as well. "He is very, very approachable," said Chan. "Because he wears so many hats, he has a lot going on all the time, but he was open to suggestions and very kind to us. He took the time a week before we left for Toronto to stay and talk with me



about what he envisioned the character to be and what he hoped for the film. I thought it was very nice to work with him."

The film's special effects are subtle, generally used for computer images and enhancing futuristic devices. "The hand-held vibophone that we worked with or even those sleep busters didn't really work, you know," laughed Chan. "It's amazing what they can do with CGI. On the set, they were very creative with how they made them appear to be in the final cut."

One piece in particular gave the actress problems. In the beginning of the film, a piece of her com device that slips over Chan's eye. They actually rigged something together which operated from a remote. So after I sat there meditating, I open my eyes, and the thing is supposed to come in. It's a blue light, and it covers my eye. That is supposed to mean that I'm getting ready to go into the warehouse. Every time they did it with the remote off to the side of the shot, the thing would go too far and jump into my eyeball. It kept happening, so they said it must be interference from someone's walkie or cell phone. Those kind of things happen a lot."

An the film nears towards its conclusion, Dr. Fong, in the best tradition of action films, tries to escape in a speedboat. Chang and Hawkins commandeer another boat and the chase is on. "It was freezing cold," said Chan of her speedboat adventure. "There's a



"[Acting] has been something that I really don't have a choice about. It's something that I have to do."

and was in such pain when I fell that I didn't move. I was thinking, 'I'm going to cry, and the Phoenix doesn't cry, so hold still and breathe.' They thought that I was really hurt because I didn't move; I didn't make any sound at all. But everything turned out fine."

The film was originally shot as a movie of the week, with grander plans if it should click with network viewers. "It's kind of a back-door pilot," Chinna admitted. "If the response is good, there is a chance that it may be picked up as a regular series. I really loved Toronto, but I don't know if I could handle the cold, because I grew up in California. I really enjoyed it there. I love working. I love being submerged in the whole acting thing."

In a world and industry where your looks generally pigeonhole you, Chinna has been able to garner not only Asian typecasted roles, but some less generic parts as well. "I've been lucky enough to go out for both and I've been able to get some nontraditional roles," she said. "I'm pretty happy with that. It gets pretty tiring to speak with an accent and wear a Chinese dress. I think typecasting is a problem with the media. It's getting better, but a lot of times, I don't know if they're obligated, when they have these Asian episodes on these TV shows, it's always that we're immigrants. If it's a hospital show, it's about the Asian family that doesn't know if they should use modern medicine because they do little rituals at home. Hey, we're not all like that. We actually go to the doctor, but they hardly show that. I think it is improving a lot, and it's very exciting. I think this is a very good time right now for women and also for minorities. It looks like we're becoming more visible in a positive way. It's very hopeful."

**A**cting for Chinna is an internal thirst that can't be quenched except by performing. "I was watching the Golden Globes and Barbra Streisand told of an incident where a young woman came up to her and said that she didn't know if she should be an actor. She asked the singer what did she think. Streisand said something like 'if you have to ask, then the answer is that.' That is true — for me, performing, and especially acting, has been something that I really don't have a choice about. It's something that I have to do. If acting didn't exist tomorrow, I would be one confused person. To me, it's worth all the frustration. It's worth the effort that sometimes isn't necessarily recognized. For me, working, and being able to go places within myself to explore different sides of my own personality, is wonderful. I feel so lucky to be able to communicate to other people, to tell a story or move somebody. Just to express myself has always been a need of mine since I was one or two years old. I enjoy it. It's amazing to enjoy something so much and to get paid very well for it. That's something that I'm lucky enough to be able to do."

One of the more esoteric talents that Chinna has developed is fire-eating. Several years ago, Chinna was collaborating with a Korean Theater group for a play called *HAVE YOU HEARD?*, an annual event. The show is a collection of sketches about the Korean experience, including traditional dance and drumming. The director gathered his cast and told them that the following Monday he expected them to come back and to do something extraordinary. "He wanted to open this show almost like a circus, with everybody doing something that was out there that would really capture everyone's attention," said Chinna. "I thought 'Oh God, I really don't know how to do anything.' I went home and thought and thought, and then I called Dan Kwong, who is a well-known performance artist that I knew I used. 'You've got to teach me something.' He suggested the Chinese yo-yo. I said 'No I don't want to do that. Do you have something exciting that you know how to do?' 'Do you want to learn how to eat fire?' he asked. Hesitating, I said, 'Oh, okay.' So I went over to his place and he taught me how to do it. In a lot of ways it goes with my personality, because I enjoy being fear. Let me tell you, to get your hand to actually put this flaming stick into your mouth goes against all reason. I watched him do it maybe twenty or thirty times until I said, 'Okay you're not dead yet, so I guess I can do it.' It's just taking risks and doing something exciting. I like that." □

some where I'm supposed to jump over to Dr. Fong while he's driving the boat. I'm kicking him and pushing him and trying to get the bribe from him while he's driving. I just assumed that the boat would be towed so that we could fight, but they really had him driving the boat. It was so horrible for both of us. The poor man had never driven a boat before. I think he just learned that day how to drive the boat. We weren't in the middle of the ocean free and clear of everything; we were driving nowhere all the boats were docked because that's how they wanted to show it. The director was in another boat with a megaphone yelling 'Drive the boat faster!' Denise yells back 'I can't, she's kicking me, and I don't want to crash.' A lot of the situations we were in were actually very close to the truth of what was going on. It was very difficult and we only got a limited number of takes. But it was fun."

**F**un or not, Chinna also took some rough falls making Lucy Chang look good. "I [am] descending from the top of the warehouse building when I think I'm about to capture Dr. Fong," said the actress. "They put this harness on me and then this wire that's connected to the top. They put all the gun except the gun on me and we did one rehearsal of me going down this line. When we were actually going to shoot it, the weapons man came over with the gun and put it over my shoulder. It was about a ten-pound Uzi. All I had to do was come down the line, and when I got a couple of inches off the ground, before my feet touched the ground, I [was] supposed to pull the cord, land on my feet, pull out the Uzi, and say 'Don't move, Dr. Fong.' It's supposed to be this big dramatic moment. I got to that point, I pulled the cord, and fell on my face. I was pitched forward. When I was hanging and the harness was connected to the top part of my back, the extra weight of the gun made me really top-heavy, so when I pulled the cord, my head went first, instead of my feet. I think that would be one of the other outcomes. I was so shocked



# LETTERS

## SHOULD VAMPIRES STAY IN THE OLD SCHOOL?

Thank you for your review on **THE BROTHERHOOD**. From what I read in *Femme Fatales*, (Sept /Oct 2001 volume 10-4) issue, I don't think I will be seeing this movie any time soon. A fraternity of vampires sounds great, but when vampires use needles rather than using fangs, and go out and about walking around in the daylight, it just sounds like a bunch of wannabe vampires that are similar to the subculture of "goths." Come on, that's what makes vampires fun- watching them transform into bats or wolves, sleeping in their coffins, turning into mist, biting the necks of their victims. The vampires in **THE BROTHERHOOD** sound boring!

Sincerely yours,

Ajala Najar  
Red Bluff, Ca.

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Blood-sucking Elizabeth Brudzinski is "Megan" in *David DeCoteau's* **THE BROTHERHOOD**. "Times have changed... Shouldn't vampires?"

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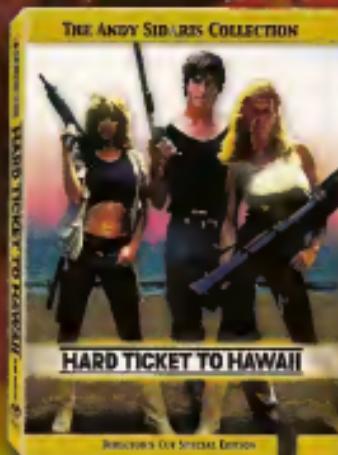
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